Super Teen

By

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Dedicated to all those
who know
‘the old ways work best’

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and dialogue, except for incidental references to
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Wellingsville

“Clark? Breakfast is ready, honey!” shouts Martha from the bottom of the wooden stairs.

“Okay mom!” replies Clark.

In a blink of an eye, the fifteen year old manages to make his bed, grab a yellow t-shirt, blue jeans, blue jacket, brown boots, get dressed, and shriek down the stairs. Martha turns and sees her son standing outside the kitchen.

“What took you so long, Clark?” she asks with a smile.

Smirking, Clark asks, “Where’s dad?”

“Outside trying to fix the oil cooler on the tractor. You know those things are expensive to replace and money is a hard thing to come by these days.”

Martha places a plate filled with scrambled eggs and bacon on the table in front of Clark. After grabbing a glass of milk, Clark says, “Be right back, mom.”

In a dash, he’s out the screen door and into the field, where Jonathan is standing next to a John Deere tractor.

“Hey, son. Would you mind lifting this thing up? I think I can fix the cooler’s leak with this here cooler sealant.”

“Sure, dad.”

Though no one lives within three miles, Clark cautiously looks around to see if there is anyone watching. Satisfied no one is, he lifts the tractor with one arm.

“Steady, Clark. Yep. Right there. Hopefully that’ll do the trick.”

Clark gently lowers the tractor to the ground.

“Thanks, son.”

“You’re welcome, dad. Gotta go eat and get to school.” He leaves in a flash, as Jonathan proudly smiles. In the kitchen, Clark gobbles the eggs, bacon, and milk in seconds.

“Clark. You’re going to upset your stomach by eating like that,” Martha says, her hands on the side of her floral apron.

“Thanks for breakfast mom, and don’t worry, my stomach will be fine. See you later.”

After running his hand over his stomach in a joking gesture, Clark kisses Martha on the cheek, grabs his brown book bag, and bolts to the bus stop where a yellow bus approaches. A minute later, he sits next to his best friend, Pete.

“Hey, Pete. Where’s Khloe?”

“Her old man is dropping her off at school on the way to work. Something about having to drive to Metropolis for a meeting with his boss,” Pete states, as he tugs at his brown jacket and burgundy Hawks school t-shirt. His light brown skin glistens in the sun as the bus turns and stops to pick up another student.

“Man, the first week of school stinks,” Pete assumes, shaking his head.

“Why, Pete?”

“Cause we’re freshmen, dummy. Starting back at the bottom is never good.”

“Ah, don’t worry, Pete. It won’t take long for you to meet some new people and make friends. Besides, who are you going to meet that’s as cool as me and Khloe?”

Clark smiles and Pete can only smile back, his brown eyes peering out the window as Clark’s blue eyes look towards the sky.

As the students exit the bus, Clark and Pete both see a familiar face waiting for them: Khloe. Her short blonde hair flows across her face as the wind hits her. On her left shoulder she holds a yellow handbag. Her white, ruffled blouse matches her light blue jeans and her flat, white shoes.

“Hey, guys!” she says, waving at them. Khloe’s blue eyes never leave Clark as he and Pete approach her. Clark, six foot, and Pete, five foot seven, stand taller than the five foot five Khloe.

“Okay, I know it’s the first day of school and we’re freshmen, but look at the bright side,” she says as she opens her palms upwards.

Clark and Pete look at each other until Pete says, “Which is?”

“The day’s already started and that means we’re not as ‘new’ as we were yesterday.”

“Um, sure, Khloe.”

“C’mon, Pete. Don’t be a downer.” Khloe slaps the side of Pete’s jacket and the three begin to walk towards the steps that admit entrance into Wellingsville High.

“Are you trying out for the school paper, Khloe?” asks Clark, as the three head into the noisy hallway crowded with students.

“I’m thinking about it. How about you guys? Thinking of signing up for some technical courses and use your brains instead of brawn?”

Clark looks away as the thought of trying out for the school’s football or lacrosse team plays through his mind, as it did all summer long. Because of his abilities, his mom and dad have sidelined him from playing any school sports or sports activities outside of school, other than shooting hoops with Pete outside near the barn shed.

“You know us, Khloe. We’d rather try out for the swim team than for advanced science or arithmetic classes,” replies Pete, as the three separate and go to their respective lockers. Thankfully for Pete and Clark, their lockers are only four apart.

“Hey!” shouts Khloe. “I was thinking of electric or carpentry courses, not academically advanced classes. I know those bore you guys to death.”

Pete shakes his head at her, turns to Clark, and says, “I was thinking of trying out for the football or lacrosse team this year, Clark. How about you?”

“I don’t know, Pete. I’m really not good at sports.”

Clark shuts his locker and stares down the hallway as a couple, holding hands, walks his way. The girl with green eyes, five foot five, long brown hair, wearing a red top, white cotton skirt, white sneakers, holding a green handbag, grins at Clark. Her boyfriend Steve, the blonde-haired six foot two inch Captain of both football and lacrosse teams, does not.

“Clark, you can hold your own against yours truly shooting hoops. What makes you think you can’t….Clark? Earth to Clark.”

Pete waves his hand in front of Clark’s face, breaking the spell Lana holds over him. Off in the distance, Khloe frowns, observing events that have taken place far too many times in her mind.

“I should have known. Anytime Lana is around you Clark, you freeze up like a popsicle. C’mon. That’s the first bell. Being late for class the first day of school gives a bad impression.”

“Sure, Pete.”

Clark looks away from the young couple and heads down the hall into History 101 with his best friend by his side.

“Clark, just think about it, okay? I mean, lacrosse would be so cool to play together, don’t you think?” asks Pete.

Clark nods his head, his thoughts still on Lana.

“Look, I’m going to head over to Coach Adams’ office after lunch. I’ll grab a permission slip and tell him you want one, too. That’ll save you the time from hearing any stories from the ‘legendary’ Coach Adams’ mouth. How about it?” grins Pete.

Stopping outside of the classroom, Clark replies, “Sure, Pete. Why not?”

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“Mom? Dad? I’m home.”

Clark places his bag on the tan couch and walks into the kitchen.

“Hey mom, is dad around?” he asks, giving Martha a peck on the cheek.

“He’s in the barn loft, stacking hay he baled earlier. Anything I can help you with?” she questions, as she begins cooking roast chicken.

“I’d rather ask dad. It’s got to do with sports.”

“You know that’s a touchy subject with him, Clark. Use your words carefully, okay?”

“Okay, mom. Thanks.”

Clark heads outside and walks towards the barn loft, carrying a permission slip in his hand. Inside, Jonathan is finishing up stacking hay.

“Dad? Can I talk to you for a minute?” he asks, standing a few feet away, paper in hand.

Jonathan wipes the sweat from his brow and replies, “Sure, Clark. What’s on your mind?”

Clark looks at Jonathan’s beige, rugged jacket, his blue jeans, dirty from work, and looks down at the dirt.

“What’s the matter, son?”

“Sometimes I think I should skip school and help you out here.”

Jonathan steps towards Clark, places his hand on his shoulder, and says, “Son, today was your first day of school. Three things: One: you definitely do not want to skip your first day. Two: you have helped me beyond measure here on the farm, using your abilities to fix the wooden fence, lifting tractors, baling hay, and that’s just for starters. Three: I want you to do something with your life that doesn’t dirty your hands and involve the daily grind of work that I do. You can understand that. I know you can.” Clark smiles wishfully as Jonathan notices the paper Clark’s holding.

“Is that a permission slip?”

“It’s for lacrosse. I’m not going to try out for football. I know you and mom are against it because you both think I

may use my abilities in the heat of the moment. But lacrosse is different," pleads Clark.

"How so, Clark?"

"There's not much physical activity at all and we only use sticks with mesh nets to catch and throw the ball and-"

"I know what the sport is son," says Jonathan, putting his hand up to stop Clark's speech. "There can be some physicality to it, though. What did your mother say?"

"I didn't tell her. I told her I wanted to talk to you about it because it involved sports," Clark replies, gripping the permission slip paper lightly.

"Clark. Your mother was an all-star fielder on her softball team and believe it or not, she knows more about some sports than most men in town do. Sports or not, we discuss it as a family. Let's go inside and talk about it." Both men walk silently till they go inside the yellow and white house and into the kitchen, where Martha has finished cooking dinner.

"You two ready for a meal fit for two kings and-"

"And one queen," interrupts Jonathan.

"And one queen," smiles Martha.

Martha sets the roast chicken on the table with mashed potatoes, gravy, and string beans. Looking at Clark, she notices he is silent.

"Okay you two. What's going on?" she asks, as she sits down at the wooden table and runs her hand through her reddish-brown hair.

“Clark has a permission slip to play lacrosse. I told him we should discuss this as a family.”

Martha peers at Jonathan, his dirty-blonde hair looking the same as when she first saw him many years ago. His blue eyes hint as to the conversation to come.

“Mom, it’s not like I’m going to be running into people or tackling them. I’ll only be tossing a ball into a net. It’s really no big deal. Even Pete is-”

“Pete doesn’t have to worry about breaking anyone’s arm or dislocating someone’s shoulder, should you just ‘happen’ to hit someone, Clark,” interrupts Jonathan.

“Dad, I-”

“Okay, okay,” intercedes Martha. “I know where this conversation is going. Clark, I understand what you’re saying but I think your father is right. If you accidentally hit someone, they could get hurt and-”

“And it could alert someone to your abilities. That’s something that cannot happen, son. I vowed to protect you from anyone or any agency. We need to do our best so they never find out about your abilities.”

“But dad-”

“I’m sorry, Clark. No is our answer.”

Clark shakes his head and heads up to his room.

“Jonathan, sooner or later we’re going to have to trust him with his abilities,” states Martha.

“I know, honey. But sports? Any sport is taking too much of a risk. He just has to learn there are some things he

can’t do that others can. I know it’s difficult, but it’s the only way to protect him,” he says.

Martha begins to make a plate of dinner for Clark.

“I’ll bring this to him. You know, sometimes I wonder if we’re not protecting him Jonathan, that maybe we’re protecting ourselves because we’re afraid to let him grow up and make decisions on his own,” she says, grabbing Jonathan’s hand. Jonathan nods his head in agreement as Martha ascends the stairs towards Clark’s room.

“Clark? I brought you a plate of food,” she says, as she opens his door. Clark lays on his bed, staring at the ceiling. Martha places the plate on his dark brown bureau and sits on the side of his bed.

“Clark, believe it or not, we would like to sign that permission slip. It’s just-”

“I know, mom. I know. My abilities. I’ve heard it time and time again. It just gets frustrating seeing my friends do things that I know I can do, but can’t do because of who I am.”

Martha is silent for a few seconds, then speaks.

“Clark, remember when you were eight and you wanted to help me with the dishes? You grabbed six dishes and they shattered because you gripped them too hard. And there was the time you knocked on the back door because you wanted to hurry in and watch your favorite TV show but it was locked so you knocked harder and put a hole right through the door.”

“I remember mom, but that was when I was nine years old. I should have just gone around and went in the front door. But I’m fifteen now. I know how to control my abilities a lot better now than I did then.”

“Clark, you think you do. When you were ten you looked at Billy Wilson’s arm and asked him when did he break it? Remember the look on his face when you asked him that? He said he didn’t remember telling you that and luckily I was there and I told him I mentioned it to you because his mom had told me, which she did. Call it invisible vision, whatever it is, that ability just up and manifested itself out of nowhere. And maybe you’re right: maybe you can control what you know but you’re still growing and there isn’t an instruction manual that says what power may manifest next,” she says as she touches his hand. “I know Jonathan can be stubborn but you can be, too. We both want what’s best for you.”

Clark smiles at Martha, her blue eyes glistening in the sun’s rays that enter the room.

“I know you do, mom.”

Martha walks towards Clark’s door, turns and says, “Just keep being you, Clark. It’s who we love.”

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The next day at school, wearing a red t-shirt, blue jeans, and his brown boots, Clark heads into the office of Coach Adams.

“Coach? I’m sorry but I think I’ll have to pass on lacrosse this year,” he states as he places the blank permission slip on his desk.

Various State trophies and awards litter Coach Adams’ office. Clark glances at these and the award certificates that hang on the wall. The coach, nearing seventy years of age, his body older but still muscular in his Wellingsville Hawks school burgundy and yellow sweatsuit, rises from his desk and looks Clark in his eyes.

“That’s a disappointment, Clark. Your father was a great football player and I can tell the strong genes run in the family.”

“I’m adopted, Coach.”

“That doesn’t mean a thing, Clark. What I meant to say is, I can see you have what it takes to be a leader. You’re tall, built strong, and you’ve got a good head on your shoulders from the grades I’ve seen from your previous school. Why don’t you take back this slip and go on and tell Jonathan that Coach Adams highly recommends his son play lacrosse,” he states.

Clark looks at the coach, noticing the grey hair coming from under his Wellingsville Hawks hat, and begins to speak as Steve, Lana’s boyfriend, walks in with two of his friends.

“Hey, Coach.”

The Coach’s face lights up when he sees Steve standing there.

“Now here’s a player, Clark. A fine man indeed,” Coach Adams says, shaking Steve’s hand.

“What are you doing here, Clark? This office is for sports, not home cooking,” mentions Steve.

Steve’s friends giggle as Clark looks away.

“Clark was just reconsidering playing lacrosse,” states Coach Adams, staring at the boys.

“Yeah? I always thought you were afraid of a little contact, Clark. You never signed up for sports at Wellingsville middle school. Think you can hang with the big boys now? After all, wouldn’t want that precious face of yours to bruise up. You know, being a farm boy and all. Could keep you from doing your daily chores,” ridicules Steve.

An anger courses through Clark as he feels his head getting warm, his eyes heating up. Clark hurries out of the office, his head down, his permission slip in hand, through the halls, past the lockers, amid the various students standing and talking about the day’s activities and gossip. Pete and Khloe walk towards the school newsroom and notice Clark walking fast down the hall.

“Clark! Khloe’s going to the newsroom and I’m headed to Coach Adams’ office. You wanna- hey! Clark?”

Clark hurries past his two friends, his right arm covering his eyes. Once outside, he walks past the yellow buses waiting for students and jogs towards the nearest field, where he runs as fast as he can, his eyes burning as he winces, not fully opening them, and finds himself home in less than a minute. Once there, he opens his eyes in a straw field, where fire shoots out and burns the straw to crumpling dust. Jonathan, on his tractor plowing the field, jumps off and runs towards Clark. His arms flaring out, Clark points towards Jonathan.

“Dad! Stay away!”

Almost on reflex, Clark lowers his body temperature, and shoots ice from his eyes to smother the flames. Jonathan can only stare in awe as to what he is witnessing. Clark, hunched over from being mentally exhausted, looks at the smoldering smoke rise, then towards his father. Jonathan approaches Clark.

“Son, it’s okay. Whatever that was is over now.”

Immediately, Clark opens his mouth and blows into the smoke, dissipating it.

“Okay. I guess now it’s over?” Jonathan surmises.

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“Wow,” Martha gasps. “I know we said your abilities would continue to emerge as you grow, but this? This is something I never dreamed would happen.”

She sips a freshly made cup of coffee as she, Clark, and Jonathan, sit in the living room.

“You’re saying you can lower your body temperature, Clark?”

“Something like that, dad. It’s hard to explain. I just know that after I shot fire from my eyes, my first reaction was to cool down, which I think produced the ice from my eyes. After shooting ice out, for a brief second my eyes were blurry, like a mist or fog. Literally for about a second,” explains Clark.

“Clark, we understand why you got angry at those boys today. Your mother and I had a talk and-”

“Dad, you can’t possibly understand. Look at the fireplace. See the wood?”

Jonathan and Martha look towards the firewood. Clark concentrates and lights the wood with heat from his eyes.

“See? How can you understand that? And my breath. Who knows what capacity my lungs hold? Or how much damage I can do with just breathing out like that?” wonders Clark, as he begins to pace back and forth.

“That’s not what we meant, Clark. Your dad was talking about what happened when those boys were jabbing at you,” says Martha.

“And it’s not just breathing out, Clark. You breathed in, filled your lungs with air, and then breathed out. I don’t think it’s an ability that just happens. I think you have to

willingly make it happen. Listen, son. I want to help you with this new ability with your eyes. Follow me."

Clark looks at Martha, who shrugs, and follows Jonathan into the barn loft.

"See those bottles over there?" points Jonathan. "I want you to concentrate on each one and use your eyes, hot or cold, to knock them off."

Clark sees five bottles on stacks of wood about twenty-five yards away.

"But dad. All this hay. It could catch on fire if-"

"Just concentrate, son. Your mother and I trust you." Jonathan pats Clark on his back as Clark stares at each bottle. Lighting his eyes, he fires at the first bottle, but misses. Quickly, he concentrates and puts out the small flame his beams started with ice from his eyes.

"It's okay, son. See? You hit the hay with your, ah, 'ice beams.' Just concentrate on one bottle at a time, Clark."

Clark again stares at the bottle and shoots fire from his eyes, cutting the bottle in half. A smile emerges on his face.

"Ha! I knew you could do it," Jonathan says, as he claps his hands once.

"Thanks, dad. It just takes some serious concentration and focus."

"That it does, Clark. Now, take your time, and hit the other bottles."

After a few minutes of back and forth, Clark manages to hit all the bottles.

"Alright! Alright! I did it, dad," Clark joyfully exclaims, hugging Jonathan. After cleaning up, they both walk back towards the house. Inside, Martha is informed about Clark's training.

"I really think I can handle these new abilities. Would you guys please just rethink me playing lacrosse?"

Clark places the permission slip on the table as Jonathan and Martha smile and nod their heads in agreement.

"Okay, Clark. You can practice. See how it goes. But there is one catch. Martha?"

Clark's mom gets up, reaches into her beige handbag, and pulls out a pair of glasses with a black frame.

"We know you have excellent vision. Better than anyone in Wellingsville or maybe in the world. We want you to put these glasses inside your bag as a reminder of what your eyes can do. It's easy to forget sometimes, Clark. Things escape Jonathan and me from time to time."

"At least this way, if you do get angry, you can look and see your glasses in your bag, touch them, or put them on your face, and maybe that will remind you of the harm you can do if you're not responsible. We're trusting you to be responsible by signing this permission slip, son."

"I will be, dad. And mom? Thanks."

Clark kisses Martha on her cheek, smiles, and heads up to his room with the signed slip.

“I hope we did the right thing, Jonathan.”

“So do I, Martha. But it’s like you said: he has to grow up and we have to let him make his own decisions and accept responsibility for his actions.”

He hugs his wife and looks out the wooden window, as the sunlight begins to fade away into the soon-to-be night sky.

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“That’s great, Clark. We’re gonna destroy the competition on the field. I knew you’d come around, man.” Pete smiles and pats Clark on the back. “Man, you’re solid back there. What’ve you been eating for breakfa-”

“Hey, guys. Guess what?” interrupts Khloe, coming from around the corner of the hall.

“What?” the boys respond in unison.

“You’re looking at the new editor of The Wellingsville Sun,” she states with a smile.

“Never heard of it,” Pete sarcastically says, as Khloe lightly punches him on his brown jacket.

“Seriously, Khloe. Pete and I are happy for you. Right, Pete?”

“Right, Clark.”

“Thanks, guys. That means a lot to me, coming from my two best friends.”

She spins around, holding her brown book bag close to her frilly, yellow blouse, and walks away

“See what being nice does for someone, Pete?” Clark says, as they walk towards the school exit.

“I know, Clark. Lighten up, man. You need a sense of humor.”

Clark wishes he could tell Pete about his abilities but he worries that the information may be too much for Pete to bear. Deeper inside, he worries that his best friend since the age of eight would look at him differently. That maybe, Pete would look at him like he wasn’t human, like he was a freak.

“Clark! Haven’t seen you much this week,” says Lana, as she approaches on the school steps. Students briskly walk past the three of them as the weekend starts.

“We’re not in any of the same classes,” he responds, looking to see if Steve is around.

“Steve told me you signed up for lacrosse. That’s great. I’m on the cheerleader squad for the team,” explains Lana, standing on the steps, as she waits for Clark to respond, her light green shirt rustling in the wind.

“I’m glad to hear that. Aren’t you, Clark?” Pete asks.

“Ah, yeah. Great,” responds Clark.

Lana looks at the two of them and says, “Thanks, guys. See you around, Clark.”

The boys watch as Lana walks away from them, her hips swaying in her blue jeans.

"Clark. Why'd you clam up, man? Can't you see she wanted to talk to you?"

"I just get, I don't know, I guess, nervous, when I'm around her, Pete."

"I think I have to teach you the finer ways of talking to girls, Clark."

"She does have a boyfriend Pete," Clark says as they head towards the bus.

"So? If he was doing his job, she wouldn't have eyes for you, my man."

"Who says she has eyes for me?"

"Me, that's who. Your pal, Captain 'cool' Pete."

Their laughter is interrupted by the appearance of Khloe again.

"Guys, you won't believe what my first story for The Wellingsville Sun is. Pete, you remember when my dad dropped me off because he had to go to Metropolis for a meeting?" she asks, clutching onto a piece of paper.

"Yeah? What about it?"

"Here: read this. And Clark? I'm sorry."

Khloe looks away and sees students smoking, laughing, goofing around, near the steps of school and on the grass. She notices the already familiar faces of Wellingsville middle school extending their relationship to High School,

holding hands, some kissing, and thinks to herself '*if only that were Clark and me*.'

"Is this true, Khloe?" Clark spats.

"Huh? Sorry, daydreaming. It looks like it is, Clark. My dad didn't know anything about it. I swear."

Pete and Clark look at each other, both frowning.

"When my dad hears about this from me, he's going to get very angry Khloe," says Clark as the three walk towards the school bus.

"My guess is that he already knows. Lional had the letters mailed out yesterday."

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"I can't believe this, Martha. Just who in the world does Lional Legasy think he is?" asks Jonathan, his arms extending on the kitchen table.

"Don't get so angry, Jonathan. It's not good for your heart," she states, rubbing his chest in his blue flannel shirt.

"Heart? Heart? Who can think of 'heart' in a time like this? He says he wants to buy out all the farms leading to the main highway to build luxury condos. Here? In Wellingsville?"

"We won't sell, Jonathan. And that-"

"Your darn right we won't sell, Martha. The only way Lional Legasy will ever get this property is over my dead

body!” Jonathan slams his fist on the table, which causes a small glass to topple and spill its contents of coffee.

“I’ll get that.”

“No, it was my fault, Martha. My temper got the better of me.”

Martha watches as Jonathan wipes the stain on the cotton table cloth off with a wet rag. Clark enters the house and his parents turn his way.

“Hey mom, dad. Khloe showed me-”

“This, Clark?” Jonathan hands him the same paper Clark saw earlier.

“Yeah. Apparently Khloe’s dad was put in charge of the project, though he objected to it. Lional threatened to fire him if he didn’t agree to it. They can’t afford-”

“I know, Clark. But you know what? Neither can we. Taking a lump sum payout, especially at the rate Legasy’s offering, would put all of us in the poor house in less than two years. Trust me on that. We’ve got too many bills as it is and this money wouldn’t solve anything long-term. But it’s not just a matter of money, Clark. This farm has been in my family for over one hundred and fifty years. From my grandfather to my father to me, and I’ll be damned if anyone is going to tell me what to do with it!”

Clark looks down at the beige floor tile as Jonathan continues.

“It says here that he’s offering the Reeves, the Hackmans, and the Rosenbaums the same deal. Now, I

know Clive Rosenbaum and I haven't exactly seen eye to eye in the past, but I guarantee we will on this issue."

Martha touches Jonathan's hand, looks into his blue eyes with her own blue eyes, her red hair softly touching her yellow sweater, and says, "Please calm down. Being angry won't change a thing. You know that."

Jonathan runs his hand through his blonde, wavy hair. He begins to nod and says, "You're right, Martha. You sure are my rock."

They hug each other as the phone begins to ring.

"I'll get it."

Clark answers and Khloe begins to speak on the other end.

"Clark. I just wanted to call and see how your parents were doing."

"They're taking the news as best they can, Khloe."

Jonathan turns to Clark and says, "Clark. Please tell Khloe we don't blame her father. We know he's only doing what he thinks is best for his family."

"Thanks, dad."

"What?'

"My dad wanted me to let you know he isn't angry at your dad. He understands."

"Thanks, Clark. That'll mean a lot to him. He thinks the world of your family. Say, how about I meet you tomorrow at the Wellingsville Fair? I think we could all use a bit of fun and games."

“Sounds good, Khloe.”

Clark hangs up the phone and smiles, watching his parents still hugging.

“What?” asks Martha, smiling.

“Nothing. Just that you two are the best parents anyone could’ve ever asked for.”

Clark hugs the both of them as the cows in the barn begin to make sounds.

“Well, back to work, Martha.”

“I’ll help, dad.”

“Don’t you have any homework, Clark?” asks Martha.

“You kidding? I can read and write within minutes and bam, I’m finished,” he grins.

“Alright. But don’t be too long. The roast will be done shortly.”

Looking at each other then Martha, Jonathan and Clark both reply, “Yes, maam.”

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The Wellingsville Fair is filled with vendors selling everything from clothes, food, toys, and even sheep. Martha’s stand consists of her famous chocolate chip cookies and homemade apple pie. Clark helps Jonathan unload the pickup truck with crates that house these items as well as watermelon, corn, and tomatoes.

“Clark! Khloe’s here!” yells Martha.

“Go on, son. Thanks for your help. I’ll take it from here,” Jonathan says, his beige shirt sticking to his body from sweat.

Clark walks towards Khloe, who is wearing a light blue top, blue jeans, and white sandals.

“Hey, Clark. Came to get some of your mom’s famous cookies,” she states as she takes off her tan sunglasses and places them in her brown handbag.

“Better hurry. They’re going fast,” he reveals.

Khloe smiles and looks to see who Clark is staring at.

“Who’s that guy in a black suit?” asks Clark.

“I don’t know, but I’ll bet my last dollar he’s not from around here,” she replies.

The man with the bald head, small beady eyes, wearing all black, walks confidently towards Martha’s stand. Nodding his head at Khloe, smiling at Clark, he turns towards Martha.

“Someone told me this is the place to get the best chocolate chip cookies in Wellingsville,” he says with a grin.

“It sure is,” Clark responds, as the man extends his hand to shake Clark's.

“Lex Legasy.”

“Nice to meet you, Lex. I’m Clark.”

“And this must be?” Lex asks, peering towards Martha.

“My mom, Martha. And this is Khloe.”

Lex shakes their hands and picks up two twelve pack trays of cookies.

“How much are these, Mrs.?”

“Oh, please, call me Martha. That will be $20.00.” Lex hands her $30.00

“You gave me too-”

“It’s a tip. Something to let you know I appreciate the work it took for you to make these delicious cookies. Well, nice meeting you all. Maybe see you around sometime, Clark.”

“Yeah, maybe.”

The three watch as Lex walks towards a sleek, black Mercedes and places the cookies in the passenger side.

“Clark. That’s Lional’s son. What’s he doing in Wellingsville?”

“I don’t know Khloe, but I’d sure like to find out. Maybe he can talk his dad out of trying to buy up all the farmland in Wellingsville.”

“Don’t you think you’re reaching, Clark? You just met him and from what I’ve heard, Lional’s son isn’t known for his utmost gratitude.”

“Everyone deserves a chance, Khloe. Even a-”

“Who was the guy in the three piece suit?” asks Jonathan.

“Ah, Lex Legasy. He’s-”

“Lional’s son. I’ve heard of him. What’s he doing out this way? Shouldn’t he be in Metropolis by his dad’s side

destroying another business?” he says, wiping the sweat from his mouth with his shirtsleeve.

“I don’t know, dad. He seems like a nice guy.”

“Clark, you just met him. Anyone can seem nice at first sight but trust me when I say that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree where the Legasy’s are concerned.” Jonathan pats Clark on the back and Clark shrugs as Lana and Steve approach.

“Hey, Clark, Khloe. Did you two see the guy in the black suit?” Lana asks, holding Steve’s hand.

“Yeah. Apparently Lional Legasy’s son is here in Wellingsville for some clandestine reason, for which I will undoubtedly find out what that reason is,” Khloe retorts, smiling.

“Maybe he heard how wonderful your mom’s chocolate chip cookies taste, Clark.”

“Maybe, Lana.”

Clark and Steve stare at each other and the girls notice the awkwardness of the situation.

“Um, we’re gonna go and try our hand at one of the games. You guys wanna come?” asks Lana.

“No, thanks. I’m staying here to help out my parents with-”

“Hey, Lana, Steve” Martha intercedes. “It’s okay, Clark. Jonathan and I-”

“Will need all the help you can get once people see your pies start flying off the shelves,” says Clark as his eyes widen to Martha’s.

“Right. Well, it was nice seeing the both of you,” says Martha.

“Nice seeing you too, Mrs.-”

“Please, Lana. Call me Martha.”

Lana smiles, as her and Steve walk towards the various games.

“Well, that *wasn’t* awkward,” says Khloe.

“C’mon, Khloe. You see the way Steve looks at me. Personally, I don’t like him either.”

“Yeah but-”

“Hey, Clark! Khloe! Who was the bald guy in the three piece suit that tore out of here in that sick-looking Mercedes?” Pete joyfully asks as he approaches the food stand where Clark and Khloe are.

“Lex Legasy,” replies Khloe.

“Oh. Well, at least his car is cool,” states Pete, frowning.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” asks Clark as he packages up two apple pies in a box for a happy customer.

“C’mon, Clark. You heard what his dad is doing, trying to buy up all the farmland to build condominiums. You think Lex doesn’t know anything about that?”

“If he does, maybe he doesn’t agree with his dad. Everyone deserves a chance, Pete.”

“Even a Legasy?”

“Even a Legasy.”

“Then why don’t you go ask him, Clark?” Khloe amusingly says.

“How would I do that? I don’t even know where he lives.”

“I do. A talking bird gave me the scoop his father bought up that old mansion on Lakehurst Drive. My guess is he’s staying out there.”

“You mean the one that’s been rotting for over a hundred years?” Pete chimes in.

“Yep, but the birdie also told me reconstruction on it is almost finished. I’ll give you the address, Clark.”

She writes it on a small post-it note and hands it to him.

“How about you guys join me?” he asks.

“No can do, pal. I’ve got a hot date with Melissa. We’re going to see that new creature feature at the old theater. See you two around,” grins Pete.

As Pete leaves, he wishes that Khloe was his hot date, but respects that she only seems to have eyes for his best friend Clark.

“Oh, I can’t either, Clark. I’m knee high deep in getting the Wellingsville Sun up and running. I’m going back home to try to put a few stories together for next week’s first paper, including the one about Lional gobbling up the farmlands as soon as possible for his own greed.”

Khloe begins to walk away as Clark says, “But the Wellingsville Sun doesn’t come out till the middle of the week.”

“I know. Better to be safe than sorry, Clark. There, see? You just learned something new.”

She smiles, does a twirl, her blonde hair flowing in the light wind, as Martha approaches Clark.

“It’s okay, Clark. Maybe you should go alone and talk to Lex. Anything you could find out will help.”

“Mom, I just met the guy. What makes you think he’s going to tell me anything about what his father is up to?”

“Because you’re the boy next door Clark, the voice of reason, and everyone loves you.”

She kisses him on the cheek and Clark can only smile.

“Go on. Your father and I will be fine here by ourselves.”

Clark begins to walk towards a corn field but stops, as he sees Lana and Steve playing a water gun game. Steve holds her by her waist as she shoots the water in a small mouth to win a prize.

“See? I knew you could do it, Lana. All it takes is concentration. When I play lacrosse or football, I usually-”

He cuts off his super hearing and begins to disappear in the maze of corn, cautiously looking around to see if anyone sees him. With no one in sight, Clark runs through the high corn stalks until he gets to his destination, which is at the outskirts of Wellingsville. He approaches a brick and mortar mansion, sitting atop a field of vacant grass

and scattered leaves. The gate, which is a steel, black, high rise with sharp ends, is open. Clark walks through and notices a fountain that has a mermaid statue distinguishing water. Rocks litter the walkway and marble columns painted bronze fill the way to the door. He sees the black Mercedes parked near a small building that is on the premises. Cautiously, he knocks and a man, dressed in black, with a buzz cut, wearing sunglasses and an earpiece, opens the door.

"Yes?"

"Um, My name is Clark. I met Lex today at the county fair and I was wondering if-"

"It's okay, Lucius. His mom makes the best chocolate chip cookies in Kansas. How can I help you, Clark?" asks Lex, as he approaches the doorway. The five foot eight entrepreneur places both hands in his silk silver embroidered robe.

"Sorry to bother you, I was wondering if we could talk about something that, well, your father is-"

"Trying to buy up all the farmland and turn it into luxury condominiums?" Lex says smirking, his arms now folded, leaning against the door's fixture.

"Yeah. Something like that."

"Clark, even though we just met, I think-"

"Lex? Lexy baby, are you finished talking to your friend?" a woman asks, walking towards him wearing nothing but a satin silver robe. She has long, silky brown hair, hazel

eyes, and her body is that of a runway model. She puts her arms around Lex’s waist, kisses his mouth, looks at Clark, and winks. Clark blushes.

“Um, Clark. Why don’t you come by tomorrow morning? That is, if you’re available to? We can discuss business then,” says Lex.

Clark, grinning from ear to ear, says, “Okay, Lex. And Lex? Thanks.”

Lex nods and closes the door.

==========

The next morning after breakfast, Clark finishes cleaning the dishes in record time. Three seconds, to be exact.

"I'm going over to Lex's house. I should be home in time for dinner," he states to his mom, as he buttons up his red flannel shirt.

"Okay, Clark. And good luck."

"Thanks, mom."

As Clark exits his home, he sees Jonathan chopping wood near the barn loft.

"Hey, dad."

“Hey, son. On your way to Lex's home?"

"Yeah. Dad, I know how you feel about Lional but maybe Lex can somehow help. You always said if it's worth the shot, then take it."

"Yes I did, but what makes you think Lex would be willing to help? Why would he go against his dad?" he asks.

"Khloe said her dad heard there's some sort of rivalry going on between the two of them. He didn't say what it was. Only that Lional told Lex he needs to make his bones in Wellingsville before he can return to Metropolis."

Jonathan looks at the cloudy sky and pulls up his beige flannel sleeves.

"Know something, Clark? Somehow, I believe that crazy story coming from her dad. It sounds *exactly* like something Lional would do."

"I guess there's not a lot of family bonding between the Legasy's," Clark adds, as he begins to walk away.

"Son, that *is* their way of bonding."

==========

"You never played racquetball before, Clark?" Lex asks, as he hits the small ball, ricocheting it against the wall. Clark dodges it as it comes his way.

"No, Lex. Somehow racquetball hasn't made my top ten list of sports to play."

"You know you're supposed to hit the ball, right? That's what the racket in your hand is for," he teases, pointing. Clark nods and Lex serves the ball and Clark gently backhands it. The ball comes towards Lex who hits it again and Clark taps it with a flick of his wrist. It hits the

wall at an odd angle which makes Lex miss as it comes towards him.

"See, Clark? It's not so hard."

Lex picks up the ball and grabs a towel, wiping the sweat from his brow. He throws Clark one and as Clark catches it, he quickly raises his body temperature to produce beads of sweat on his forehead.

"I wasn't prepared to play racquetball today, Lex."

They walk out of the room, across the field, and into the mansion through the back door. Inside, Clark marvels at the Greek statues situated along the main hall. Chandeliers lighting the hall showcase modern art paintings that are worth millions. Bodyguards, dressed in black suits with sunglasses, stand ready and at attention in front of each entrance.

"Don't you think that's a bit of overkill?" Clark asks, looking at the posted guards.

"Not at all, Clark. My father has many enemies. Better to be safe than sorry. Here," Lex states, handing Clark a bottle of Evian water.

"But they're your father's enemies, not yours, Lex."

"Clark. My father's enemies *are* my enemies. They seem to think the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree," he says, as he sits in front of his black, marble desk. Clark looks upon a huge painting of a woman that hangs above the bronze fireplace.

"Who's she?" he asks.

"My mother. She died when I was five years old," he says solemnly.

"I'm sorry, Lex."

Clark pulls out a black Italian leather chair and sits.

"Thank you, Clark. But you didn't come all this way to talk family history. By the way, how did you get here? I didn't notice a car out front."

"Oh, my uh, dad dropped me off."

Lex nods then asks,"I take it the reason you're here is because of what my father is planning to do with the farmlands?"

"Yes. I was hoping that maybe you could meet some of the families and see how much this land means to them. Lex, this land is all my family and the others have. If we lost it, I don't know what we'd do."

Lex clasps his hands together and for a moment, stares at Clark.

"Clark. I know we don't know each other that well, but let me give you a bit of advice: never let your feelings dictate your words. Meaning, it's best to not voice your thoughts and concerns. Only voice concrete facts. With that said, my father sent me here because well, he believes I need some 'personal training' before I get back to Metropolis and run one of his businesses. Personally, I think he's wrong about that and he's wrong to try and buy all of you out. Now, from what you've said, no one is going to sell,

which means my father is already going to take the next step: buy up your mortgages and use them as collateral."

"He can't do that, Lex!" shouts Clark, moving forward.

"Clark, my father has many friends in high places. Buying up the mortgages is something he will definitely try next. He somehow got the municipal approvals for the permits to begin construction if your family and the others sell. That usually takes years. It took him a few days."

"There has to be a way to stop him, Lex," gasps Clark. Lex stays silent for a few seconds, his mind lost in thought.

"Give me a couple days and I'll see what I can do," states Lex.

Clark nods his head.

"Thanks, Lex. I'll tell my parents over dinner tonight. At least it'll give them some hope."

Before Clark leaves, Lex blurts out, “Clark! You need to work on your forehand," moving his wrist from left to front.

"Thanks, Lex. I'll keep that in mind."

They both smirk as Clark leaves the room.

==========

The sun’s rays glisten off of mirrored skyscrapers; steel and metal buildings grace the streets of the world's foremost city: Metropolis. Below, thousands of people walk briskly amid the streets to their foregone jobs. Horns blast

in standstill traffic, as frustrated drivers swear and sit in gridlock. Lex Legasy, dressed in a black Givenchy suit, smiles as he crosses the street, the 'Don't Walk' sign flashing, and thinks to himself '*It's good to be home*'. He approaches a fifty story skyscraper, where inside, a very powerful man is conducting business on his phone.

"That's great, Gordon. Tell Wellker I'd love to do business with him. Between the three of us, we'll be able…..to-"

"HI, dad."

"Ah, no no, just a minor 'inconvenience' has presented 'itself' in front of me. Yes, that's fine. I'll talk to you then." Lional slams the receiver down.

"Sorry to interrupt, dad. Talking to one of your shark friends?" Lex bemusingly asks, as he grabs an apple from a Harrods silver tray.

"Lex! Son! Shouldn't you be somewhere in a field shucking corn?" Lional asks as he pours a Macallan 12, neat.

"Seems like you've already beat me to it, dad. At least, the shucking part," he states, biting into the apple. "By the way, nice suit."

"Giorgio Armani, Lex. You can never go wrong with the classics. Didn't I already teach you that…..when you were six? Now, why are you standing in my office when last we spoke I clearly said not to come back here until you were

ready to, which, judging by your irrational behavior, you are most definitely not."

Lional turns his back to Lex and glances out the huge office window, his long, curly dark brown hair and slender figure silhouetted by the sun's light.

"It seems your rancid ambition to destroy Wellingsville's farmlands to build over-priced luxury condominiums has spoken volumes about your……*integrity*. Or lack thereof."

"Lex, don't tell me men and women wearing flannel shirts and blue jeans digging trenches are warming up to your….*gentler* side?" his father asks, sipping his drink.

"You sent me to Wellingsville to rebuild and make a name for myself. What better way for me to do that than to stop you from accomplishing your goals?"

"And how do you propose to do that, Lex?"

"I'm sure there's a kink in your armor somewhere, dad. Weren't you the one that used to say to me 'Know your enemies?'"

"Lex, I'm your father, not your enemy. My advice to you is go back to that hick town, find something to invest in there, oh I don't know, a movie theater or perhaps girl scout cookies, but stay out of my business. Because if you don't," Lional says as he stands in front of Lex. "You will make an enemy of me. And you know what happens to my enemies……*son*."

==========

"Everyone take their position! One, two, and wheeeeeeeee!" Coach Adams blows the whistle and the Hawks begin lacrosse practice. Clark, playing midfielder, catches the ball in his racket and tosses it to Steve, who is playing attack position. He approaches the goalie, takes the shot, and scores. Lana leads the cheer from the sidelines.

"Nice going, Steve, Clark. Okay. B-side now!" shouts Coach Adams.

Pete, on the opposing practice squad, starts trotting up the field, then tosses the ball to Roland, who runs midway across the field and flicks the ball to Norris but Clark steps in front, intercepts it and tosses it to Steve as Norris collides into Clark, falling onto the grass.

"Sheesh, man. What are you, made of steel? I think I separated my shoulder," he states, clutching his right shoulder. Steve sinks the ball in the back of the net and scores again.

"Time out!" Coach says as he and two trainers on his staff rush to Norris.

"It's your shoulder?" asks Coach.

"Yeah, Coach. I can't move it."

Coach Adams stands up, blows his whistle and yells, "Okay! That's enough practice for the day."

Clark walks towards Norris and Coach Adams.

"Sorry, Norris. Sorry, Coach. I didn’t mean to-"

"It's okay, Clark. It was an accident. These things happen," Coach says as he taps Clark on his shoulder. Lana and the rest of the Wellingsville Hawks cheerleading squad look on with worried faces. She drops her pom poms and rushes to Clark's side.

"Hey, Clark. Don't be upset. I saw the whole thing. It wasn't your fault. It was an accident."

She grabs Clark's hand as Steve walks towards them.

"I don't think Clark's the one that needs comfort, Lana. After all, his recklessness caused Norris' injury," he states, staring at Clark.

"Steve, that's not-"

"Why don't you go and put your pom poms away, Lana. Clark and I have a few things to discuss."

"Don't talk to me like that Steve," she says as she turns and walks away.

"Are you always rude towards the people you care about, Steve?" asks Clark.

"You should mind your own business, farm boy."

Steve looks Clark in the eye as Clark steps forward and says, "Maybe someone should teach you what the word 'manners' means."

"Okay everybody! Hit the showers!" blares Coach Adams.

"Another time, farm boy."

Steve leaves for the locker room as Clark hears a familiar voice.

"Clark! Nice hit!" Khloe shouts as she comes his way.

"It was an accident, Khloe."

"Accident or not, you laid him out! Nice hit Clark, " Pete says, putting his hand on Clark's shoulder.

"Pete's right. See? I've got it on my camera. I can see The Sun's headline this week: 'Man of…..Iron stops opposing player cold on field'," she says as she uses both hands to project a headline.

"We're on the same team, Khloe. We were just practicing. There isn't any reason to do a story about someone getting injured."

"Clark. Please don't tell me you don't want me to run the photo and story," she inquires.

"That's exactly what I'm saying, Khloe. Norris is hurt and it's my fault."

Clark jogs towards the locker room as Pete shrugs his shoulders and follows.

"Hey guys! C'mon! Give me some lead way here!" yells Khloe.

"Sorry, Khloe! Can't hear you!" Pete says mockingly, at a distance.

"I guess it's going to be one of those days," gasps Khloe.

==========

"Clark, don't let it get you down, man. I'm sure Norris is gonna be okay."

Clark thinks to himself *if you only knew, Pete. Norris separated his shoulder because of my body mass, because my body is made of some unearthly substance foreign to me because I don't know where I was born nor where I came from. In fact-*

"Earth to Clark! Man, what is it with you zoning out?" Pete asks as they sit on the bus.

"Sorry, Pete. I guess I just have a lot on my mind with the farm and school."

"Yeah well, I wouldn't hold my breath for Lex to get back to you. It ain't like he's a guy that champions for good causes," mentions Pete.

"I don't know, Pete. He seemed okay when I spoke to him."

"Anyone can look good after one meeting, Clark. Even bad guys."

"I guess time will tell, Pete. Anyway, I wanted you to be the first to know I'm quitting the team," he says, frowning.

"What? You're seriously quitting after one practice?" he asks.

I sure am, Pete. I shoot fire and ice from my eyes, can toss tractors for miles, and can blow out a forest fire, and that's just for starters. Wait till I tell you-

"Clark? There you go again, man. Listen, it was an accident and-"

"Playing lacrosse just isn't for me, okay? Just drop it, Pete."

They both sit in silence for the remainder of the ride.

==========

"You made the right decision, son."

Jonathan rises from the table and says, "I'm going to feed the livestock now."

He walks out of the kitchen as Clark and Martha sit and discuss Clark's 'accident' today.

"Your father's right, Clark. Your abilities are still developing and until you know truly what you're capable of, it's best to refrain from sports."

"That's easy for you to say, mom. It's like I've had to hide from friends, sports, and activities, my whole life. If I knew who my biological parents are and where I was born then maybe I could understand my abilities more."

Clark places his head on his arms. The phone in the living room rings as Martha says, "Hold that thought. Hello? Yes he is. Who should I say is calling?"

She places her hand on the receiver. "It's Lex."

Clark accepts the phone from her.

"Hello? Sure. Okay, I'll see you soon."

Placing the phone back on the wall receiver, he turns to Martha and says, "Lex wants me to come over tonight. I know it's a school night but he says it's important and doesn't want to discuss anything over the phone."

"Sounds a bit paranoid, Clark."

"Mom, where Lional Legasy is involved, being paranoid comes with the territory."

“Okay. Just don’t stay out too late, okay?”

“I won’t mom. Hopefully Lex has some good news. We all could use some now.”

==========

Inside Lex's mansion, Clark is escorted by one of Lex's guards to his office.

"Clark. Have a seat."

Lex pours himself a brandy.

"Want a drink?" he asks, smirking.

"No thanks, Lex. What'd you call me over here for?"

Lex looks at Clark for a moment as he drinks his brandy.

"I went to Metropolis to speak to my father. Long story short, he's hiding something or rather, *someone*, and I think I know why."

"And this has something to do with him trying to acquire my family's farmland?"

"Yes, yours and all the others. See Clark, you can't just go and get information and permits from the city, realtors, and state in such a fast time unless someone rushed the process, bypassing literally hundreds of other proposals that were ahead of my father. Do you know anyone that's good with computers?"

"Khloe. She's the editor of the school paper."

"Okay. I'm going to give you a name. My advice to you is give it to her to research. And before you ask, the reason I don't is because I'll only go so far to stop my father. I don't agree with what he's doing but it's up to you to uncover any *dirt* that may rise," Lex states as he finishes his drink.

"I understand. And Lex? Thanks. I really appreciate all the help you've done."

"Clark. Just remember: wherever my father is concerned, bad things can happen. Stay alert."

==========

The next day, Clark and Pete walk into the small room Khloe uses for the school paper. Clark, wearing a blue t-shirt and blue jeans, sees the layout for the week's new edition on the desk.

"Khloe, I thought you said you weren't going to run that photo," he says, pointing at the picture.

"No, *you* said you didn't want me to. I never said I wouldn't."

She swivels around in her black office chair, her blue eyes wide, highlighted by her short, blonde hair.

Pete chimes in, "That's kinda disrespectful, Khloe."

He folds his arms across his yellow t-shirt.

"C'mon, guys. Look at the headline," she states.

"We already did: 'Accidents happen': local jock dislocates shoulder by slamming into first year player'."

"What's wrong with that, Clark?"

"For one: it's disrespectful towards Norris, showcasing his injury like that. And two: I quit the team earlier today."

"What? Why?" she exclaims.

"I have my reasons. I'd tell you but they'd probably wind up in some extra edition," Clark surmises, as he looks around the small room.

"I'd never do that," she speaks.

Clark and Pete look at each other, then Khloe, and nod both their heads.

"Sheesh. Tough audience."

"Khloe, if I give you a name, can you find some information that may or may not be on the internet?" asks Clark.

"Now we're talking. 007 spy stuff. What do you have?" Clark reaches inside his pocket and produces a small post-it note.

"Just promise me that you won't publish anything about this in your paper until I say it's okay?" he asks, holding the note in the air.

“Okay, okay you got it. I promise. What is-?”

“It’s a name Lex gave me to research. Somehow about being involved with the farmland project with Lional.”

“Who’s Tommy Futone?” she asks.

“I don’t know but if you can, please look into that name for me. If whatever you find may help my family and others

save their land, then it's worth more money than there is in this world."

"Okay. I'll get right on it."

"And the lacrosse story?" asks Clark.

"Are you blackmailing me. Clark? Just because you may have given me a blockbuster story, and only time will tell, doesn't-"

"But it could be a blockbuster story, Khloe," Pete chimes in.

"Okay, okay. I won't run the stupid lacrosse story or photo. But this tip better be good."

As Clark and Pete leave the small office, Khloe snaps her fingers and says, "Hey, Clark. Thanks for the tip."

Leaving, Pete turns to Clark and adds, "I don't know, man. Khloe may sound like she has your best interests in her heart, but when it comes to news, it's like a spectre or something takes her over."

"I know what you mean," Clark agrees, as the two best friends walk through the crowded halls.

"Hey, Clark! I heard you quit the team already," Steve states, as he and two of his friends walk towards Clark and Pete.

"Clark. Why don't you just punch this guy's lights out?"

"Believe me Pete, I'd like to but the last thing I or my family need is a suspension from school."

Steve and his friends, all wearing the Wellingsville Hawks burgundy and yellow t-shirt with dark blue jeans and sneakers, start snickering.

“I knew you’d be afraid of a little physical contact. I don’t know why Lana would ever be friends with someone…..” he stands inches from Clark’s face and adds, “*like you*.” Pete comes between them and shoves Steve.

“Hey, man. Why don’t you just back off?” he states.

“Pete, it’s okay,” Clark beckons as he puts his arm across Pete’s chest.

“All right. I’ve about had it with the both of you! C’mon guys!”

Steve and his friends put their fists up and as Steve is about to throw the first punch, he hears a familiar voice:

“Steve! Bill! Mark! Stop it!” Lana yells as she grabs Steve’s arm.

"Lana, chill."

Steve yanks his arm away from Lana’s hand.

"No, *you* chill, Steve. There's no need for anyone to fight. You guys are acting like children."

She looks at Clark who is staring at Steve.

"Lana's right. There's no need to fight, Steve. Let's go, Pete."

Clark bumps his way past Steve and his friends as Steve says, "Another time, Clark."

Clark feels his eyes becoming hot, opens his book bag, and grabs the glasses his parents gave him. Holding

them, he remembers he can control this ability, and quickly, he lowers his body temperature, the fire in his eyes being extinguished before it started.

"I didn't know you need glasses."

"I uh, don't. They're just reading glasses. No reason to wear them now."

"What's the deal between you and Steve, anyway?" Pete asks.

"I don't know, Pete. I wish I did, then maybe he and I could talk about it."

Both teens put away books in their lockers.

"Well, whatever it is, I hope he figures it out and soon."

"Me too, Pete. Me too," Clark agrees as he watches Lana and Steve walk together down the hall.

==========

"It worked, son?"

"Yeah, dad. As soon as I grabbed the glasses, I took control and lowered my body temperature. It was like just looking at them reminded me I'm in charge of my abilities, and not the other way around."

Clark hoists the pickup truck up with one arm, as Jonathan finishes changing the oil and filter.

"Thanks, son. Sure beats laying on my back doing that." Clark lowers the truck. Jonathan wipes his hands on a small rag.

"You really believe Lex has your best interests in mind, Clark?" Jonathan asks, leaning on the truck.

"I think so. He sounded honest. I know you think he's probably just like his father, but you and mom taught me to give people the benefit of the doubt. And that goes for Lex, too."

Clark looks at the blue sky as Jonathan asks, "How did you ever become so smart?"

"I've had two great teachers," he replies, smiling.

==========

As Clark walks into the barn loft to gaze at the stars, Jonathan and Martha have a conversation that they have dreaded for many years.

"I think it's time, Jonathan," she says, drinking a cup of tea.

"I know, Martha. It's just, once the cat is out of the bag, and it's a big cat, we can't go back to the way things were."

"I know, but he needs to know why he has these abilities and more importantly, where he came from."

"You're right. Let me go get him," acknowledges Jonathan.

"I'll wait here for a few minutes then meet you outside."

Jonathan walks outside, stops and looks at the night sky, and proceeds to walk into the barn loft.

"Son? Can you come down here?" he asks, looking up at the loft where Clark sometimes sleeps. In a flash, Clark is standing in front of Jonathan.

"What's up?"

"Follow me, son. There's something your mother and I should have shown you a long time ago."

Bewildered, Clark follows Jonathan outside till they get to a small opening in the cornfield, where a steel door is hidden.

"Isn't that the storm bunker?" asks Clark.

"Yes it is."

Jonathan takes off the padlock, opens the steel door with both arms, and walks down the concrete stairs with Clark. He pulls the string on a dangling light bulb which produces a dim light. Jonathan starts to remove a dark grey tarp.

"Why are you showing me the old tractor?" Clark asks.

"I'm sorry, Clark. I lied when I told you what was underneath this. It's definitely not a tractor."

Pulling the tarp off, Clark's eyes widen as he sees a small, slender ship of some kind.

"I don't know the composite of it. I thought it was metal or steel, but it doesn't seem to be. Nothing can penetrate it and nothing leaves a mark when you hit it. I tried opening it a few times with Martha, but it doesn't budge."

"What is it?"

Clark's eyes widen as he studies the object before him.

“It’s what brought you here, son. More importantly, it’s what brought you to us.”

Jonathan looks at the stairs as Martha enters.

"That's right, Clark. This ship is what brought you to us." She stands next to Clark, who begins to circle around the ship.

"But how?" he asks, puzzled.

"We don't know, son. There was a bad storm, the one that asteroid caused when it entered our atmosphere."

"The one with the tornadoes, hail, and torrential downpours of rain?" Clark asks as he bends down and taps his hand on the ship. “I remember reading about it in an old newspaper from grade school.”

"That's the one, son. Martha and I were running into this bunker when we spotted something burning, coming towards us."

"Burning?"

"That's right, Clark. The ship that brought you to us was in flames. Not even the rain could douse those flames. We think you were traveling too fast," Martha replies.

"And that's when we saw it pummel into the cornfield. We ran towards it. It was pouring rain and by the time we got to it, the flames were gone."

Clark looks at Jonathan and Martha in disbelief.

"And that's when the small hatch opened. You were laying in it with a red and blue blanket wrapped around you. I grabbed you and Jonathan took off his jacket and

wrapped it around us to shelter us as we walked back towards the bunker."

Jonathan and Martha hold each other as Clark glances at them with an astonished look.

"Mom, dad. Are you saying I'm from space?"

"We don't know where you're from, son. Only that you're definitely not from this planet," Jonathan speaks.

It takes a moment for Clark to take all the information in.

"I'm some kind of alien?"

Martha approaches Clark and touches his arm.

"Clark, you're as human as anyone ever has been."

"Sure, if they can shoot ice and flames from their eyes, lift tractors, never break a bone, among other things," he says, walking away from the ship. "The blanket. Do you still have it?"

Martha nods her head. "I'll show you it when we go inside."

==========

"I know this is a lot to take in, son. We wanted to tell you before but there never seemed a good time to do so." Jonathan leans forward on the couch, Martha sitting by his side.

"We really did, but something always seemed to come up," agrees Martha.

"I get that. It's just…..a ship? I mean, what am I, from another planet?" Clark asks, rising from the couch.

"I wish we knew, son," states Jonathan.

"Clark, here: this is the blanket you were wrapped in." Martha stands and hands Clark the red and blue blanket. Jonathan hugs Martha as Clark holds the only thing connecting him to his true home.

"This is all I have from my true origin. Do you think my birth parents put me in this?" he asks.

"You know as much as we do but we think they did. That blanket is full of love, Clark. I could feel it, Jonathan could, and I'm sure you can, too."

Clark holds the blanket close to his nose to smell it.

"There *is* a distinct smell to it. Almost like…..I don't know. Just something different. I can't describe it."

Clark looks away for a moment, then says,"I may be from another planet and even though I have different birth parents, you two are my mom and dad. I think it's important you know how I-"

"Oh, Clark," Martha cries as she hugs him. "That's about the best thing you could ever say to us. Just remember one thing: even though you have these amazing abilities, you're more human than anyone on this planet."

Clark smiles as Jonathan adds,"You're mother's right, Clark. You have more compassion, more maturity, and more love than anyone I've ever known or met. You can count on that."

"Thanks, guys. I think I'm going to sleep in the loft tonight. I've got a lot to think about and looking at the night sky may help."

"Okay, son."

Clark leaves, grasping the small blanket in his hands. Jonathan says to Martha, "That went about as good as it could."

"Yes it did."

==========

On top of the barn loft, Clark sits on his bed while staring at the blanket. Thoughts race through his mind *did my parents wrap me in this, how far away from Earth is my planet, am I going to turn grey like an alien, what new abilities will I develop, how can I open the ship, maybe Lex-*

"No," he speaks aloud. "No one can ever find out. They'll treat me like an outcast and the ones that don't will be put in danger because of what they know. Mom and dad have always been right about my abilities: I have to keep them and this a secret. All of it."

==========

"Clark, you'll never guess what I found out about our venerable Mr. Futone," says Khloe, as she extends a

report to Clark. Her purple blouse blows from the fan inside her office.

"What's this?"

"Read it. C'mon, you read faster than anyone I know." Clark knows this but pretends to thoroughly look the report over.

"It says councilman Tommy Futone was convicted of accepting bribes from the Hauer mob. He gave them construction jobs in exchange for millions of dollars. Khloe, how is this guy not in jail?" Clark gasps.

"Easy. Lional Legasy had one of his rich lawyers cut a plea bargain with the federal judge."

"How does this help us now?"

"Easy. My little birdie friend told me the construction firm Lional's using is a dummy corporation that is actually ran by Hauer, whose permits were approved by councilman Tommy Futone. Hence the phrase 'dirty money'."

Clark gathers his thoughts for a moment.

"Khloe, you could get in big trouble if Lional ever found out you looked into him like this."

"I know Clark, but now we've got something on him. Just think of the Sun's headline: 'Billionaire's mob ties come crashing down in Wellingsville'. Has a ring to it, don't you think?" she smiles, her smooth skin radiating with happiness.

"Khloe, listen to yourself. Lional Legasy is a dangerous man. Who knows what he'll do when he finds out about

this. I don't think you should run the story but there has to be a way to use this against him," Clark states as he walks around the small room.

Khloe turns to him and says, “Oh great, Clark. The story of the year is handed to me on my lap and I'm supposed to what, look the other way and do *nothing*?"

"Just give me a couple days to figure something out, okay?"

"And what am I supposed to run for a story this week? I can see it already." She motions with her left hand. "New pom pom colors cause distress among students. Yeah, *that's* award winning material."

She sits on top of her desk, her arms crossed, tapping her foot against the side of the desk.

Clark shrugs his head and says, “Just give me a couple days, okay? I promise you you’ll have your story. You kept your promise to me and I’ll keep mine to you.”

He leaves as Pete is coming in.

"What's the news of the day?" he asks, grinning.

Khloe grins then frowns.

==========

"Mr. Legasy is currently conducting an experiment in his lab."

The guard points to the small building Clark had seen on his first visit to the mansion.

"Thanks."

Clark walks through the gravel stone walkway until he approaches the small building. The structure itself is made of steel, brick, and mortar. There are no windows and only one steel door that gains entrance inside.

Clark knocks on the door while saying, “Lex, it's Clark. Lex?"

He concentrates and uses his vision to peer through the steel and see where Lex is. Clark sees a figure holding one bottle while pouring something into another. He checks to see if the door is locked. It is.

"Lex! It's Clark!"

"Clark? Hold on a second."

Clark listens and hears footsteps approach the door. Opening, Lex smiles and says, “Clark. Come in. I've been conducting a new experiment dealing with-" he turns and points to a table with potions, bottles, and other small objects, and says, “Time travel."

Clark looks bewilderingly at Lex, who is wearing a white DuPont protective overall outfit with sterilization gloves.

"Time travel?" asks Clark.

"Einstein said 'the theory of special relativity proposes that time is an illusion that moves relative to an observer.' I'm trying to find out if that is true or not, Clark."

Lex pours two bottles into a single cannister, mixing the elements together. Clark looks around the lab. He sees tables with mice running on spherical machines, bottles with heat and smoke coming from them, as well as countless tools laid across various tables.

"Don't worry, Clark. I'm not some mad scientist nutjob. I'm trying to do something for the good of humanity."

"Lex, if you could go back in time, where would you go?"

"Good question. I'll answer that later. But who said anything about going *back* in time? Now, I know you didn't come all the way out here to talk about E=mc2. What's up?"

"Khloe found some information on the name you gave me, Tommy Futone."

"You mean the mob ties?"

"Yes *and* that your father had him springed from jail with a bogus plea deal by some federal judge. Wait, you knew all this already, didn't you?"

"I already told you I'll only go so far as to gathering dirt on my father, Clark. Call it gamesmanship."

Clark picks up a tube that contains a yellow substance.

"I wouldn't mess around with that, Clark. It's a flesh eating bacteria that disintegrates your skin on impact."

Clark gently places the tube on the table.

"Just kidding. It's just sulfur, Clark."

"Lex, my friend Khloe wants to run a story about your father's ties to Futone. I told her she shouldn't but she's persistent, to say the least."

Lex mixes two solutions in one bottle and a small eruption occurs. Liquid shoots out and smoke billows from the bottle. Clark winces.

Coughing, Lex says, "I knew it! Can't you see what I'm doing here, Clark? If I can solve time travel, think of all the good we can do in this world," Lex states, smiling.

"Lex, your dad?" Clark reminds Lex.

"If I were your friend, I wouldn't run the story. My father holds grudges….and that could be dangerous for your friend."

"Then what should we do with the information?" asks Clark.

Lex looks away, then turns to Clark and says, "Tell you what, Clark. You get your friend to print up an article with the information she has and bring it to me. We'll see where we go from there after I've read it."

"Okay. Thanks, Lex."

Before he opens the steel door to leave, he notices a strange black rock behind a small glass enclosure.

"What's that?" he points.

"That's one of the only known rocks left in existence from the asteroid storm years ago. It's called Blackburn. I remember watching the asteroid fly past my father's home,

wondering where it came from. I was just a kid. I also remember seeing….."

Lex pauses.

"Lex?"

"Nothing, Clark. Just lost in thought for a moment."

Clark begins to approach the glass case the rock sits in but a sharp pain comes across him. He clutches his chest.

"You okay, Clark?"

"Uh, yeah. Just some indigestion I guess. I'll see you later."

As he leaves, Lex looks at the rock and then back at the closed steel door.

==========

Back home, Clark helps Jonathan chop wood by using his hands to do it. In less than ten seconds, a pile of wood as high as the second floor in the barn loft is formed.

"Thanks, son. You're saying you felt pain inside you as you approached some rock?" Jonathan asks, admiring the job Clark just did.

"Yeah. It was like a knife was cutting me from the inside. It's hard to explain."

"And Lex Legasy has this rock?"

"It's in his lab. He called it Blackburn. He said it's one of the only known rocks left in existence from the Asteroid

that hit the Earth the same day my ship came. Do you think there's a connection?" he asks.

"I don't know Clark, but if Lex has that rock, you can better believe it's *not* in good hands."

Before Clark can speak, Jonathan continues. "I know what you're going to say. Lex gave you information to help with our situation involving Lional and the farmland. That's all good but if you think Lional's son doesn't have an ulterior motive, then you should take your head out of the sand and see the sun's light. Trust me on that."

Back inside, Clark sits with Martha as they watch the nightly news.

"I just don't understand why dad won't give Lex the benefit of the doubt. He's already proven in the short time I've known him he's nothing like his father. If it wasn't for him, we'd never know about Tommy Futone and his connection to Lional."

"I understand, Clark. Lex seems sincere but sometimes what seems to be true and what *is* true are two completely different things. Just give your dad time. If everything works out well with Lex, your dad will see that. Trust me when I tell you he hopes for nothing better than that with Lex."

Clark looks at the TV screen for a moment.

"Mom. Where do you think I came from? Do you think one day I'm going to turn grey or green?"

"I don't know where you were born Clark, but I guess it was somewhere in space, as hard as that is to be believed. And no, I don't think you're going to change colors. I wouldn't worry about that."

"I guess that's one good thing. Do you think my powers have all manifested?"

"I don't know, Clark. Only time will tell. Until then, why not focus on your schoolwork? Or maybe a special girl with long dark hair and green eyes?" grins Martha.

"Mom, please. Lana has a boyfriend," states Clark.

Jonathan enters the living room and sits across from Clark and Martha.

"That Steve fellow? He's rude and disrespectful to others, Clark. He's got nothing on you, son."

"Thanks, dad. I only wish Lana felt the same way."

"Did you ever talk to her about your feelings for her, Clark?"

"I never felt it was my place to, mom."

"Your mom’s right, son. Maybe Lana has feelings for you too, but doesn't know how to express them. You'll never know unless you tell her."

"I guess you guys are right. Thanks for the talk. I'm heading to bed now."

As Clark zips into his room, undresses, and lays in bed, all within three seconds, he thinks about Lana and his parents. He has feelings for Lana but doesn't know if he should tell her. *What if she found out about my powers?*

Would she think I'm a freak or would she keep them secret? I can't take the chance of some new ability manifesting itself while I'm around her. It could be too dangerous for her. Clark slowly closes his eyes and dreams of planets swirling about in the galaxy.

==========

Between second and third period, Pete meets Clark at his locker.

"Here you go. A certified, first edition copy of the cover of the unpublished Wellingsville Sun. Courtesy of our fine private investigator, Khloe."

Pete hands the article to Clark, who glances to his left and sees Khloe looking at him from her locker.

"I guess she's still mad about me asking her to hold off on publishing this till Lex sees it."

"You could say that," agrees Pete.

"Pete, this article may help my family and others save their farms, but I have to do what Lex says first. He doesn't seem like he's the type of guy that says something and doesn't follow through on it."

"Hey, I believe you man, but maybe you should tell Khloe that. It might help *ease* her feelings," surmises Pete.

Clark nods his head. As the second bell rings to remind students they have thirty seconds to get to class, he approaches Khloe and says, "Thanks. I really-"

Khloe gives a fake smile and walks away, running her hand through her short, blonde hair.

==========

After school, Clark heads over to Lex's mansion. Inside his office, he watches the firewood burn as Lex reads the article, while drinking a glass of Johnnie Walker Black rocks.

"Not bad, Clark. Not bad at all."

Lex places the article on top of his desk and rising from his chair, his black Givenchy suit spotless, he stands in front of the fireplace near Clark.

"My father put me in Wellingsville to 'take charge, gain initiative' before 'allowing' me back to Metropolis. I think this article is my first step back."

"How so?"

"Leave that to me, Clark. Tell your friend thanks and tell her I'm going to give her a story better than the one she has. Well, *almost* better."

"Lex, has anyone ever told you that you talk in riddles sometimes?"

"Yes. Now, tell me about this girl you like."

Lex sits on his leather couch as Clark sits across from him on the leather loveseat.

"How'd you know about that?" asks Clark.

"Because there's always a girl somewhere in a man's heart. Who is she?"

"Her name's Lana."

"Natalie's niece?" Lex questions.

"You know her?"

"Only through how her aunt described her. I purchased some things from her shop for my garden. Or what I refer to as ‘a garden'. It needs a bit of work."

"Well, she's got these gorgeous green eyes, long silky hair, and a beautiful smile. But she's also dating Steve Feldman, Captain of the football *and* lacrosse teams," Clark says with dismay.

"And?" Lex questions, raising his one eyebrow.

"What am I supposed to do? Say, 'Lana, break up with Steve because I think you're the greatest girl I've ever known and I believe we're meant to be together’?"

"I would,” states Lex.

The two stay in silence for a few seconds.

“Clark, let me let you in on a little secret about girls. I may be only five years older than you, but trust me, I've had lots of experience with them. A girl likes it when a man takes charge and admits his feelings for her. It doesn't make him weaker, it makes him *stronger*."

"What about the other guy?" Clark persists.

"You mean the school jock? C'mon, Clark. If this girl Lana can't see past his obnoxious ego, then she's not worth the time. Trust me."

Lex finishes his drink and gets up to pour another.

"There's something else, but-" Clark hesitates. *No way. I can't let him know about my abilities. I don't know him well enough to trust him completely. Mom and dad would say the same thing*.

“What is it, Clark?"

"It's nothing. I have to go. History is calling me. I'm doing a thesis on Homer's Iliad."

"So soon in the school year? Good luck. And Clark? Think about what I told you about girls. There's gotta be something useful in there,” grins Lex.

Clark nods as he exits the room.

==========

After school, Clark sits on the bleachers and watches Pete running up and down the field during lacrosse practice. The football team practiced earlier and though Steve played quarterback for the first half, he's back on the field again, shouting orders as Captain of the lacrosse team.

"You look like you should be out there," a female voice says, as she sits next to Clark.

"I guess it's just not for me," replies Clark.

"I'm Lori. My family moved here from Nebraska."

She extends her hand to Clark, who takes it and gently touches it.

"Hi Lori, I'm Clark."

He admires her long blonde hair and blue eyes. She's wearing a yellow sweater, a short white tulle skirt, and white heels.

"Most girls don't approach guys in school," Clark states.

"Well, it is a new millennium, so why not? I like meeting new people. Do you have many friends?" she inquires.

"A few. How about you? I know it can be difficult to be the new girl in town."

"Then you know most people don't give you the benefit of the doubt until they get to know you better," Lori says, looking away.

"Hey, I'm not like most people. Trust me when I say that," insists Clark.

"Well, I gotta go home and get a head start on Mr. Wilson's homework. I'm doing a thesis on the Iliad," reveals Lori.

"You, too?"

"What? You also?" she asks.

"Yeah. I must have his class the period before yours."

"Maybe we can work together on it sometime," she says, now standing.

"Sure. Maybe we can meet tomorrow after school at the soda shop in town."

"I'd like that, Clark. See ya then."

Lori strolls down the bleachers as Clark thinks to himself, *wow that was really cool. She seems sweet. Why not see her tomorrow? We could help each other with our thesis. And she is very pretty*. *What would Lex say? He'd say do it.* As these thoughts race through his mind, he does not notice Lana staring at him, her pom poms by her side, wondering who that girl was Clark was talking to.

==========

"I may be late coming home tonight, mom."

Clark grabs a light brown jacket and puts it on over his Wellingsville Hawks yellow and burgundy t-shirt.

"Really? Are you seeing a special someone with green eyes later?" inquires Martha.

He grabs his book bag and standing in the doorway replies, "A new girl I met yesterday. She's got blue eyes."

He grins and leaves. As he walks towards the bus stop, Jonathan yells, "Clark! Can you come here a second?" Looking around first, Clark zooms to Jonathan in a second.

"You don't have to yell, dad. I can hear you literally over a mile away….maybe more."

"I wanted to tell you that your mother and I are very happy how you're handling the news about your, well, origin."

"Well, I have to grow up some time and what better time than now, with two parents there with me every step of the way?"

Jonathan smiles as Clark walks towards the approaching bus. On the bus, he sits next to Pete, who wears a Wellingsville Lacrosse t-shirt. Khloe, wearing a white blouse, sits in the seat behind them.

"What's the deal with you and the new girl, Lori?" Pete asks, smiling.

"We're just studying together after school. We're writing a thesis on the same subject for Mr. Wilson."

Khloe pulls herself up, her head hanging over the seat.

"Yeah? You mean, it's not a date?" she inquires.

"No Khloe, it's not. Man, where do you guys get your information so quick?" Clark shakes his head.

"The same place you do, Clark. The student body!" Pete exclaims.

"Yeah, well your sources are wrong. We just met yesterday and-"

"Did she ask you or did you ask her?" Khloe investigates.

"What?"

"To study together. Did you ask her or did she ask you?"

Clark, not wanting anymore rumors to spread, replies, "It was a mutual thing, Khloe. Before I forget, Lex said thanks for the report and that he'll have a better story for you later."

"Really? And when will that be? Next semester?" she sarcastically says.

"No, Khloe. He said-wait, what's with the attitude today?" Clark asks.

Khloe doesn't say anything, just slumps back in her seat. Pete leans over and speaks softly to Clark.

"Dude, she's jealous. Can't you see that?”

"Why, Pete? Because I'm seeing Lori later so we can collaborate on our report?"

"Because you're seeing Lori for *anything*, Clark. Man, you really don't know anything about girls, do you?"

Clark shrugs his shoulders as the bus drives the students to school on early Friday morning.

==========

It's Friday night and the soda shop is jammed with students and a few adults. Clark sits across from Lori on a table outside under the lights. Papers and books are scattered along the table. Four empty cups are placed along the table's edge.

"Would you like another soda, Lori?"

"No thanks, Clark. It's getting kinda late anyway."

Lori, her blonde hair in a ponytail, her blue eyes sparkling in the outside lights above them, looks to her left as she hears voices.

"Late? C'mon, Lori. What are you, a bookworm like Kent?" remarks Steve.

He's surrounded by two of his fellow football teammates.

"Some of us live quiet lives," answers Lori. She grabs her paper and books, placing them in her bag.

"Quiet, huh? What about you, Kent? You in the mood for some fun?" Steve belches and his friends giggle.

"Sounds like you already got started," says Clark.

"I figured you'd say that. I have no idea why Lana talks about you the way she does, but I'm getting tired of hearing your name."

Steve and his friends, both with crew cuts and stocky builds, approach Clark.

"C'mon, Clark. My mom's going to be picking me up soon."

"It's okay, Lori. Why don't you go to the end of the shop where she's going to meet you? I'll be there in a minute."

"Are you sure, Clark?" she asks.

"Yeah, I'm sure," Clark replies, staring at Steve.

Clark waits for Lori to leave before speaking.

"Listen, Steve. You-" Interrupting Clark, Steve points his finger in Clark's face.

"No, *you* listen, Kent. I'm going to-" Clark grabs Steve's wrist on his right arm. Steve tries to free himself by yanking backwards, but Clark doesn't loosen his grip. Steve's friends begin to approach after first being shocked at Clark's reaction.

"Now maybe you'll listen to what I have to say, Steve. You better stop with the instigating, because if you don't-"

"What? What will you do, Clark?" Lana asks as she grabs Steve's wrist. Clark takes his hand off it.

"I don't expect this kind of behavior from you, Clark. That's Steve's throwing arm! You could have injured him. What were you thinking?" she exclaims.

"But Lana, he-"

"I think you should leave now."

Clark stares at Lana, then Steve, who is smiling, and walks away, finding Lori at the end of the shop.

"You okay?" asks Lori.

"I'm fine, thanks."

Clark looks at Lana as she walks with Steve, massaging his wrist, while his other arm is around her waist.

“My mom's here. Want a lift home?”

“No thanks, Lori. I think I'll walk. I could use the fresh air.”

Inside the blue station wagon, Lori says, “Other than those punks, I enjoyed our time together tonight. Maybe we can do it again sometime,” she says, as the car pulls away, waving goodbye to Clark. He waves back, softly saying, “Yeah, maybe Lori. Maybe.”

==========

"I'm telling you dad, I really wanted to punch him."

"But you didn’t, son. You showed you can control your abilities. Clark, it's all a part of growing up and you're doing a fine job of it."

“Thanks, dad.”

Jonathan begins plowing the field as Clark runs towards the kitchen. Within a second, he's inside the house.

"Mom? Mom. Can I ask you a question about, um, girls?"

Martha finishes emptying the dishwasher and says, "Sure, Clark. Is this about your date last night?"

"It wasn't exactly a date but some people seem to think it was. Ever since word went around school that I was 'taking Lori out', Khloe’s giving me the cold shower and Lana has been just plain rude to me. Any suggestions?"

Martha smiles and replies, "Khloe has always liked you, Clark. And likes as in 'more than a friend'. As far as Lana goes, maybe she took for granted your feelings for her. Even though you never expressed them openly to her, a girl knows. Trust me, Clark. It was the same way with Jonathan and me in school. And Lana's probably feeling the same way I did when Jonathan went on a date with Natalie: jealous. I'm sure that's exactly how Khloe feels, too."

Clark picks up a basketball and says, "Thanks, mom. I guess I never thought about it like that."

Walking outside, he begins to shoot hoops as Pete rides up on his bicycle.

"All right! Just what I came here for. Game of twenty one?" he asks gleefully.

"You got it," smiles Clark.

The two best friends begin to play. Clark misses the first jump shot he takes but he manages to get the rebound and put it in.

"How's lacrosse going?" he asks Pete.

"Ah, Coach is putting me on second team. Says I'm not showing enough gusto to justify first team."

Pete puts a move on Clark, spins, and does a hook shot to even the score.

"Is it true?" asks Clark.

"To be honest, I kinda lost a lot of the desire to play after you quit."

Clark attempts a jump shot and misses. Pete grabs the ball and taps it in.

"Pete, don't worry about what I'm doing. You're good enough for first team. You know you are."

Clark runs towards the net, disses Pete on his left, shoots, and scores to even the game.

"Then what, Clark? Take orders from that punk Steve? No way, man."

Pete jerks right, then left, then shoots. They both watch the ball go through the hoop.

"You're playing catch up, like always Clark."

"Not always, Pete."

Clark runs forward, then steps back, shoots, and scores. The game is once again even.

"I can't argue with you about that, Pete. You've got a point there. No pun intended."

"No pun taken, Clark."

They continue to play until Martha interrupts.

"Clark! Dinner is ready! Pete, there's enough for you, too. Why don't you stay and eat with us?" she asks.

"Yeah, Pete. Why not? Just wait a second till I sink this ball for the win."

"Like heck you will."

Clark shoots the ball and-

==========

"Hey, dad."

"Lex! What brings you here to Metropolis? That's two trips in a month. A bit premature, don't you think?" asks Lional, as he pours a glass of Macallan 12. "Care for a drink, Lex?"

"No thanks, dad."

"Well, don't just stand there, son. What business brings you here?" he asks, sipping his scotch.

Lex opens up his black leather Bottega Veneta briefcase, pulls out an unpublished article from the Wellingsville Sun, and hands it to his father.

"What's this? A teenage romp report? Lex, really. I know I sent you…." Lional pauses.

"That's it, dad. Keep reading."

Lional continues to read the article. Upon finishing, he pours himself another glass of scotch.

"What do you want, Lex?"

"For you to call off your hound dogs on obtaining the farmland to build condos. Drop it, and this article never sees the light of day," replies Lex. “I promise it won’t include the shell corporation you made linking you to Hauer and Futone. I actually have bank reports showing you sending money to Hauer’s account in the Caribbean. We both know that money was then sent to Futone to bribe him to get those construction permits to start building your wonderful condominiums.”

“All hearsay, Lex. You can’t prove a thing,” states Lional.

“Really? You want to take that chance? You know bad news is as good as any news for Legasy Corp. stock to plummet. You could lose, what, millions in less than an hour if this report gets published. In a day or two, I may even see you with a cup in your hand, *begging*, on the streets of Metropolis. Who knows what the effect of this getting out will have? Well, guess we’ll have to find out.”

Lex turns to leave.

"Are you threatening me, son? And really, why do you care about some hicks in a small town?"

"Because some of those 'hicks' are my friends."

"Don't tell me you've grown soft in the short time you've been there. I thought I taught you better Lex," sneers Lional.

"You did, dad. You taught me when you have the upper hand, go for the throat."

Lex steps closer to Lional.

"And that's *exactly* what I'm doing."

Lional stares at his son for a moment.

"Lex, you're playing a very dangerous game. Are you sure you want to go directly for checkmate? You may leave yourself open for a counter *attack*."

"I'm sure, dad."

Lex turns and walks to the door.

"You've got 24 hours to rescind your offer, dad. If you don't, then that story you're holding in your hands will not only make the Wellingsville Sun the number one selling newspaper this week, it'll also make the evening news."

==========

"Clark? Lex called. He said he has some important news to tell you and if you could please come by and see him today," Martha says as she knits a blanket.

"Thanks, mom. I'll leave now. Shouldn't take me no more than thirty seconds to get there," he smiles.

Clark zooms through corn fields, across intersections, back through corn fields, till he gets to the front of Lex's

mansion. It took all of twenty-nine seconds. After being directed by one of the security guards to the building where Lex conducts his experiments, he begins walking on the gravel walkway towards it. An explosion inside the building erupts, and Clark is thrown backwards. He quickly regains his balance and says, "Lex!" Speeding to the building, heeding no warning if anyone is watching, Clark rips off the steel door and finds Lex laying on the floor surrounded by flames.

"Lex!" he shouts. Lex does not move. Moving through the flames unharmed, he takes off his red sweater and wraps it around Lex's face. Quickly, he dashes through the jaded steel surface that once held a door. One of the guards comes running outside.

"Quick! Call an ambulance!" yells Clark.

The guard nods his head and places the call.

"Lex! Stay with me. C'mon!"

Clark begins CPR, pumping Lex's chest, again and again, till Lex opens his eyes.

"Clark? Wha-what happened?"

"Never mind that now, Lex. Just relax till the paramedics get here."

Clark holds Lex's neck up.

"Paramedics? What?" Lex looks over at the building, which is nothing but burning cinder blocks and steel frames, broken at the edges. Paramedics arrive in an

ambulance that is escorted with two police cars and a firetruck.

"What happened?" asks one of the medics.

"There was an explosion inside. I ran in and carried him out."

The medic looks towards the building.

"Everything is burning to a crisp." Looking at Lex, he continues."This young man here saved your life."

Lex looks at Clark and says, "Yes, he did. Thanks, Clark. Looks like I owe you one."

The Sheriff walks to the building as firefighters do their best to distinguish the flames. Looking over the wreckage, he notices the steel door laying on the ground.

"How'd that door come off like that?" he asks to anyone within hearing distance.

"It must have fallen off, Sheriff," Clark says.

"Looks like it was ripped from its' hinges, but that doesn't make any sense. Huh. I guess it just came down with everything else," assumes the Sheriff.

Turning to Lex he says, "When you're up to it, I'd like to talk to you. Maybe you can shed some light on what happened here."

"Sheriff, you're not saying Lex had-"

"What's your name sonnyboy?"

“Clark.”

"Clark, I ain't saying he did or didn't. I'm just saying I need something to write in my report. Be seeing you later,

Lex. You too, Clark. Seeing as you was the one that rescued him."

The Sheriff, dark skin, grizzled-bearded face, walks away as Clark and Lex try to formulate what happened.

"Is he always that insinuating?" asks Lex, holding a blanket around him.

"I've only met Sheriff Thompkins a few times. I guess he's just doing his job."

"Clark. How did you get inside?"

"I opened the door, Lex."

"The door was locked, Clark. I always lock it. Besides, I'm definitely sure I did today because I didn't want anyone interrupting me while I was working."

"What were you experimenting with that you were concerned about? Do you think that's what caused the explosion?" asks Clark.

"No. Just some chemicals that could be harmful if touched by skin. Nothing that could have caused this."

The two friends watch as the flames are finally put out. Khloe comes running with a notepad in her hand.

"Clark! Are you okay? I came as soon as I heard where the fire was over the radio. I figured you'd be here. My dad drove me. Hi. I don't think we met. I'm Khloe."

She extends her hand to Lex and he touches it.

"Khloe. I know who you are. Your father thinks very highly of you. So does Clark."

She smiles at the sound of hearing Clark's name.

"Yeah, I'm fine Khloe. Luckily, the fire hadn't spread yet when I arrived."

Clark looks through the billowing smoke with his invisible vision and sees that the black rock called Blackburn is still safely enclosed in its case.

"What happened?" she asks them both.

"I don't know, but I'm going to find out," states Lex.

==========

After a brief visit at the hospital to see Lex, who tells him about the conversation he had with his father and a short interview with the Sheriff, Clark heads home to tell his parents the good news that Lional has backed down after seeing the report linking him to Tommy Futone and the bank reports showing large transactions between Lional, Hauer and Futone that Lex mysteriously obtained.

“Clark! Where have you been?” asks Martha.

"Mom, dad! Guess what? Lex did it! Lional's dropping his bid to buy the farmlands!" yells Clark, entering the kitchen. “Lex somehow obtained bank records linking Lional to Futone. Something about illegal donations and funding through Hauer. That’s the story he told me when I saw him at the hospital.”

“That’s great, son. It really is…wait a sec….hospital? And why is your shirt burnt?” asks Jonathan.

Martha touches Clark’s shirt.

“It smells like smoke, Jonathan,” she examines.

“I guess I should tell you what happened earlier….”

After listening to Clark’s story, Jonathan and Martha look at each before speaking.

“What you did was very heroic, Clark. We're glad you're not hurt.”

“You're mother's right, son. Tough skin or not, it took a lot of courage to enter that building.”

“Thanks mom, dad.”

“Are you sure no one saw you rip that door off?” asks Jonathan.

“I am. No one was outside and the cameras were destroyed from the explosion,” states Clark.

“We're very proud of you, Clark.”

Martha touches Clark’s hand as Jonathan says, “I know you think Lex as a friend son, and he may well be one, but don't get too close to him, okay?”

“Dad, I-”

“Just keep an open mind is all I'm asking,” interrupts Jonathan.

Clark nods his head as a small gust of wind whistles outside.

“Dad, if it wasn’t for Lex getting that info on Lional, then we could’ve lost the farm,” he states.

“I know son, and you’re right but from my experience a Legasy never does something for someone without expecting anything in return. Just keep that in mind.”

“I will, dad.”

==========

“The Rosenbaum’s called and told us they read about Lional withdrawing his bid in the Wellingsville Sun,” says Jonathan. “Frank brought the paper home from school. He said the article Khloe wrote said Futone took numerous bribes from Hauer and others to pass permits for various municipal projects. In the bottom right corner was a small story about Lional withdrawing his bid for the farmlands after finding out about Futone. His name was never mentioned linking him to Futone or Hauer. I guess Khloe got her big story,” he adds.

“I think part of the deal with Khloe running the story from Lex was not to mention his father bribing Futone knowingly. Isn’t it great that Lex helped us?” smiles Clark.

“Yes it is, honey. And you helped us, too. Don’t forget that if you never went to see Lex at his mansion, then none of this would have happened,” adds Martha.

“Your mother’s right, son. We’re grateful for what Lex and Khloe did, but you’re the one that got the ball rolling on this and don’t you ever forget that.”

Clark nods as his parents smile at their son.

“Thanks, guys.”

After finishing breakfast, Martha asks Clark about his love life.

“There really isn’t one, mom. I gave Lori my number to call, but she hasn’t. I wanted to take her to that new action movie tonight.”

Before continuing, the phone rings. Martha reaches for it but before she can get it, Clark dashes and answers.

“Hello?”

“Clark? Hi, it’s Lori.”

Clark places his hand over the receiver, looks at Martha, who smiles, and proceeds to walk outside to see Jonathan.

“Uh, hey Lori.”

“Did you hear that new action movie is playing tonight at the Falcon?”

“Yeah. I uh, actually wanted to-”

“Would you like to go and see it with me?” asks Lori.

“Sure. Um, that'd be great,” replies Clark.

“Okay. I'll meet you there at seven thirty. That'll give us time to get tickets and soda and popcorn.”

“Sounds like a plan. See you then.”

“Bye, Clark.”

Hanging up the receiver, Clark looks in the hallway and sees his parents smirking, standing together.

“Got a hot date tonight, son?”

Clark smiles at Jonathan’s question.

==========

“Lex! Son! When I heard the news about the explosion, I knew I had to come as soon as possible.”

Lional pours himself a Bulleit bourbon rocks. Lex shakes his head at the entrance of his father.

“What's the matter, dad? Plane get rerouted from your meeting with Attila the Hun?”

“Lex! Don't tell me you think I came all this way to see you for any reason other than to see how my son is doing after such an awful event?”

Lex turns his back to his father and glares at the painting of his mother that hangs above the fireplace.

“You know dad, if it were her and not you, I'd believe it. But it isn't her, is it? If you really did care, you would have came to see me at the hospital,” Lex says, turning to face his father.

“Son, you know I miss your mother as much as you do. What happened to her-”

“Was as much as your fault as anyone else's.”

Lex pours himself a Jack Daniels rocks from his mini bar.

“Funny thing about that explosion. Forensics told me something I already knew,” he says.

“Which is?” questions Lional.

“That the chemicals I was using could never have caused a reaction to blow up the building. They think arson may have been involved,” says Lex, staring into Lional’s dark brown eyes.

Stepping forward, Lional speaks.

“Son, if you want to play mad scientist on your own time then expect the consequences that come with it.”

Sipping his whiskey, Lex says, “Or how bout the consequences that come with ruining your plans for building luxury condos on already occupied farmland? Was that it? ” inquires Lex. “Upset things didn't go as planned, dad?”

Lional walks towards the painting of his late wife.

“Your mother always babied you, Lex. I'm here to make sure you make it through the fire, son.”

“By burning me to death so my ashes can rise like the Phoenix, dad?”

“Lex, you can't possibly think I had anything to do with that explosion. And as for Mr. Futone, I already went on record stating I had no idea of his past or current…..indiscretions.”

Lional finishes his drink, places it on the black marble table, and walks to the hall.

“Glad to see you're doing well, son. I'll make a Legasy out of you yet.”

Before leaving, Lex yells, “Dad?”

“Yes, son?”

“You played your move. Now it's time for me to play mine.”

Lional grins.

“Just make sure you can stay in the game, son. Wouldn’t want to hang another painting next to your mother's so soon.”

Lional leaves as Lex turns and stares at the painting of his mother once more.

==========

The Falcon theater is mobbed with students and adults, both vying to find tickets for the premiere of the sold out new action movie starring Christopher Reed.

“I heard the villain in this one is the worst yet,” reveals Lori. Her long blonde hair flows over her cream blouse. She's wearing a denim skirt with small, white boots.

“Really? What's so evil about him?” asks Clark. He's wearing a red flannel, blue jeans, and beige boots. His dark hair accentuates his blue eyes in the moonlight that beams on him.

“Well, for one thing he's bald. For another,-”

“You mean bald like me?” a voice says in the crowd standing outside the theater.

“Lex! Hey, I didn't know you like these types of movies,” says Clark.

“You mean a movie about a man who flys around the world fighting evil while rescuing the damsel in distress?” he asks.

“Uh, yeah, something like that,” replies Clark.

Leaning forward, Lex whispers, “You're right; not interested but Veronica has a ‘thing’ for the lead actor.”

Both men smirk as Lex approaches Lori.

“And you are?” he asks, hand extended.

“Lori. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean anything by-”

“No worries, Lori. I was just kidding. I'm Lex. And this is Veronica.”

Veronica, long, black shiny hair, slender figure, wearing a silver satin dress with matching slingback shoes, waves.

“Clark, can I talk to you for a minute?”

“Sure. I'll be back in a minute, Lori.”

“Okay. I'll keep asking around for tickets.”

Clark and Lex walk towards the corner where a copy of the Daily Report sits on top of a trash can.

“Did you see this?” asks Lex, grabbing the paper. “ ‘Billionaire's son blows up own chemical building during clandestine experiment ’. Sounds a bit tacky if you ask me.”

Lex tosses the paper in the trash.

“Anyone find out what happened yet?” asks Clark.

“Forensics thinks it was arson. Maybe remote detonation,” Lex states. “Could’ve been someone in the woods watched me from their car with binoculars, waited for me to enter the building, then hit the detonation switch, then sped off. They found tire tracks back on the old trail about a hundred yards from my home. The cameras were destroyed in the explosion, so I can't be certain but that's my guess.”

“But why would anyone want to kill you?” asks Clark.

“Remember when I told you my father's enemies are my enemies, too?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, it's even *closer* than that,” says Lex.

Clark looks away for a moment, thinking on Lex's words.

“Hey. Enough talk about devastation. How's this girl Lori? You like her?” asks Lex, as he watches Lori and Veronica giggle about something.

“Yeah. She's really cool and down to earth. One problem, though: I couldn't get tickets for tonight's movie. She really wanted to see it. Scalpers are asking five times the cover price,” states Clark.

“You mean you need two tickets? Like these?”

Lex pulls out a pair of tickets from the inside of his black wool Valentino suit jacket.

“Aren't they yours?” asks Clark.

“Veronica's got ours. I picked up an extra set for you just in case you were here and needed them. Here. Take them.”

Lex hands Clark the tickets.

“Thanks, Lex. Let me pay you-”

Waving his hand, Lex says, “Clark. You saved my life. It's the least I can do for you.”

Clark smiles and looks at Lori who waves at him.

“She's cute, Clark. Nice legs, too.”

“So’s Veronica.”

“What? Cute? Or nice legs?” asks Lex.

“Both.”

Smiling, the guys walk towards their dates.

“I thought you said you were interested in Lana?”

“I am, but she seems to have no interest in me. Lori, well, Lori at least acts interested,” says Clark.

“Clark, from what I know about you, you’re a stand-up guy, and trust me when I tell you there aren’t many of those around.”

“Thanks, Lex.”

Stopping, Lex puts his hand on Clark’s right arm.

“Clark. The door. Was it really unlocked?” inquires Lex.

Clark looks Lex in his eyes as he says, “Yeah, Lex. It was. How else would I have gotten in?”

“I don’t know, Clark……I don’t know.”

==========

After school, Clark stands on the steps waiting for Lori. Lana smiles as she approaches him.

"Congratulations. I heard you're a hero, Clark. You saved Lex Legasy's life."

"I was just at the right place at the right time, I guess," he states.

Shaking her head, Lana says, "No. You're a hero, Clark. Not everyone would have entered that burning building."

He thinks to himself *Is she talking about Steve?*

Before speaking, Lori grabs Clark's hand.

"Hey, Clark. Lana, right?" she grins.

"Yes, *right*," Lana grins.

An awkward silence comes between the three until Pete and Khloe arrive.

"Hey, Clark, Lana, Lori," says Khloe. "Guess what? The editor at the Daily Report called and said he read my feature on Tommy Futone. He was going to keep an eye on me! Can you believe it?" she gasps.

"I told her she shouldn't let it go to her head, but clearly she has," assumes Pete.

"Yeah, I can believe it. You're going to be an ace reporter some day, Khloe. I believe in you," reveals Clark.

Staring at Clark, Khloe blushes, looks away, then says, "Thanks, Clark. Somehow I knew you'd say something like that."

“Oh, now you can read minds, huh?” jokes Pete, as Khloe punches him on his shoulder.

Steve comes by and grabs Lana’s hand.

“You ready? Coach Adams wants everyone on the bus ready for the football game in ten minutes.”

“Yeah.”

“Hey, Clark. Heard what you did the other day, saving Lex and all. Just wanted to say, ah, well…” pauses Steve, as Lana looks at him. “Just wanted to say that was really cool, doing something like that.”

Lana smiles at her boyfriend.

“Thanks, Steve. That means a lot coming from, uh, you,” says Clark.

As Steve and Lana head towards the school bus, Lana says, “See you guys around.”

Looking back at Clark as she leaves, Lana smiles. Lori *waves* to her.

“What’s between you two anyway, Clark?” inquires Lori.

“Nothing at all, Lori. We’ve been friends since I was eight. Nothing more.”

Lori senses Clark wishes it was more than friends, but says nothing.

“Clark. Mind if I talk to you for a second? You know….?” Khloe motions her head to the bottom of the stairs.

“Uh, sure. Be right back, Lori.”

As Clark descends the stairs Pete yells, “Take your time, Clark. I'll show Lori one of my famous magic tricks. Okay Lori, pick a card….”

At the bottom of the stairs, Clark pulls Khloe out of the way from a few students running down the steps.

“Thanks, Clark. You're just a regular super hero,” she admires.

“What did you want to talk to me about?” he asks.

“I know I was a bit overbearing with wanting to run that story.”

“Which one?” he grins.

“Hey, I didn't print that photograph with you and Norris colliding, right?”

“Right.”

“Okay, well, I just wanted to say thanks for telling me to put the brakes on the Futone story. Who knows what would've happened if I let the cat out of the bag early?” she states, running her hand through her short blonde hair.

“No problem. Hey, in the end you got the scoop you wanted, right?” he smiles.

“Yeah, I guess I did and I guess I owe Lex, huh? He really came through for your family and the others as well as giving me the scoop of the month,” she states.

“I wouldn't worry about Lex, Khloe. A simple thank you would be enough,” guarantees Clark.

“Think Futone will tell the feds about Lional?” she asks.

“From what Lex tells me about his father, Futone would rather spend twenty years behind bars than get on Lional’s bad side. I'm guessing the same deal goes with Hauer if they ever find him.”

“Yeah. I heard he's gone in hiding. Anyway, what's the deal between Lex and his dad? Their rivalry gives new meaning to ‘friendly’ competition,” says Khloe.

“I don't know but Lex has been upfront and honest with me from the beginning,” assumes Clark. “He doesn't seem anything like his father. I really hope people give him a chance here. He deserves it.”

Clark and Khloe look at Pete flashing Lori a card as they both laugh.

“C'mon. Let's go get those two before Pete shows Lori one of his fire tricks,” grins Clark.

“Thanks again, Clark. I really appreciate everything you did for me,” she says, thinking to herself *and I really appreciate you*.

==========

“We're almost finished with the clean-up, Mr. Legasy,” says Thomas, one of Lex's service workers.

“And the steel door?” inquires Lex, standing near what was once his laboratory building.

“We managed to get the door and frame, sir. It's just a matter of being able to put all the pieces back together. Shouldn't be too difficult, seeing as the fire didn't damage either the frame or door too much,” says Thomas. “We think in about two weeks we'll be able to-”

Lex raises his hand while picking up a small pebble from the ground.

“I want that door *and* the frame pieced together by the end of the week and analyzed centimeter by centimeter. Am I clear?” says Lex.

“Yes, sir.”

“I know that door was locked because I always place the key in my left pocket after I lock it and it was in there after Clark carried me out. I want to know how that door came off that frame…..and I want to know what Clark had to do with it.”

Lex's eyes squint as the sun descends into darkness……

==========

“Hey, guys. What a first month at Wellingsville High, huh?” says Khloe.

Clark, Pete, and Khloe sit outside the soda shop. The sun beams down on the three close friends.

“You could definitely say that,” agrees Clark.

“Hey, how about a toast,” says Pete, standing, raising his soda.

“For who?” asks Khloe.

“Who else? Us!” exclaims Pete.

Khloe and Clark stand, both raising their glasses.

“To us!” yells Clark.

“To us!” yell Pete and Khloe.

After finishing their drinks, Clark, Pete, and Khloe begin the long walk towards their homes.

“Tell me again why we didn’t get a ride to the soda shop today, Pete?” asks Clark.

“I figured since we both quit lacrosse, we could use the exercise,” he grins.

“And what about me?” asks Khloe.

“Hey, girls need to stay fit too,” he says.

Khloe smiles as she says, “Wellingsville may be a *small* town, but I for one am glad you two are my friends.”

She puts one arm around each of them.

Simultaneously smiling and hugging Khloe, Clark and Pete both say, “So are we, Khloe. So are we.”

Epilogue

"You wanted to see me, Lex?"

“Clark. Thanks for coming by. Walk with me a moment. There's something I want to show you.”

They walk past original Monet, Dali, and Rembrandt paintings, reaching the end of the hall. Clark looks at the marble floor, noticing how spotless it is. The pair approach a black lacquer door.

“Wanna guess the key code combination, Clark?” jests Lex.

Clark says nothing. Enhancing his vision, he looks beyond the door, into the room, making out silhouettes of tables, large television screens, and a……steel door.

The door unlocks and they enter.

“Lights on.”

Columns of lights begin to shine. Clark sees the steel door he ripped off partly attached to the frame that surrounded it.

“It's almost pieced together. Took a bit of time to gather everything, but the art of science is time, don't you think Clark?” Lex says, observing Clark’s reaction.

“You wanted me to come here to look at a door, Lex?’ he asks.

“Funny thing about that door, Clark. Every specialist I brought in that examined it said there’s no way possible it

could look the way it does without sheer force taking it off the hinges," he says, glancing at Clark.

"Lex, I told you it was unlocked. Seriously, what's your obsession with that door?" inquires Clark.

"None, though I do admit I have an obsession with the unknown."

"What are you planning to do? Rebuild your lab again starting with that steel door?" asks Clark.

"I don't know, Clark. I guess time will tell what-"

Clark suddenly absorbs shrieks of pain near his stomach. Looking to his left, he sees the Blackburn rock encased in a clear acrylic container.

"You okay, Clark?"

"Uh, yeah, Lex. Stomach problems. Probably ju-just bad indigestion."

Stepping out of the room, he begins to breathe normal again.

"Yeah, probably, Clark. Hey, I've got an answer to your question," states Lex.

"Question?" wonders Clark.

"The time travel one. Remember? You asked me where I'd go if I could time travel."

Clark nods.

"I'd go back to the night before my grandfather met my grandmother," says Lex, staring at a Monet painting.

"Why would you do that?" asks Clark.

“Isn’t it obvious? So I could kill him. That would ensure my father would have never been born and my mother would have met and married a caring, kind man…..kind of like your dad.”

Clark pauses for a moment.

“But it would also mean you’d never have been born, Lex.”

Lex begins walking.

“I know. Sometimes we have to make sacrifices for the people we love, Clark. Or don’t you know that?”

Standing outside, Clark looks at Lex and says, “Lex, your father……I don’t mean to invade your privacy, but what's the deal between you two? Your relationship doesn’t seem to be, well, what a normal-”

“Normal? Our ‘relationship’ is anything *but* normal, Clark. You grew up with two loving parents. I grew up with a loving mother who departed this world much too soon, and a despot of a father. You need to walk in my shoes to understand, Clark.”

The two ‘friends’ look up at the hazy sky.

“Enough talk about gloom and doom, Clark. Tell your folks I said hello.”

“I will, Lex.”

“See you around, Clark.”

Clark grins and starts to walk across the small pebble rocks that litter the walkway. Lex stares at him thinking

you're right about things not being normal Clark, but not just with my father and me….there's something different about you….I can sense it…..and I'm going to find out what it is……

Epilogue II

Clark leans on the open wooden frame inside the barn loft, gazing at the stars. His father walks up the wood stairs and stands by his side.

"Penny for your thoughts, son."

"Just wondering if any of those stars would lead me to where I'm really from."

Jonathan looks at the night sky covered with stars.

"Clark, I know you want to find out where you're from. Your mother and I wish we could help but other than that blanket and the ship, we don't have a clue, son."

"I know, dad. I'd like to look at the ship again. Maybe I can figure a way to open it. You saw the hatch open before, right?" he asks.

"Yes, and after your mother grabbed you, it closed and hasn't opened since."

Silence comes across them as a cool breeze enters the loft.

“Hey you two. Your dinner’s going to get cold if you don’t come down and get it soon,” she grins.

Looking at his dad, Clark asks, “What’s for dinner again?”

“Your mom’s homemade meatloaf.”

Clark streaks past his parents and into the kitchen.

“Well, I guess one of you is hungry,” says Martha.

“Believe me, I am too, hon. I was just thinking what a wonderful son we have,” surmises Jonathan.

“You’re right, Jonathan. We do have a wonderful son, but you know what else we have?” she asks.

“What’s that, Martha?”

“A wonderful family.”

END